

EP THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. 31 MARK 9

The Kontakion for the feast of Transfiguration explains to us that, by revealing His eternal glory to Ss. Peter, John, and James, Jesus showed that He had the power to avoid the Passion predicted in Mark 8:31; the fact that He would not avoid the Passion proves that He wanted to fulfill His divine mission. The Transfiguration is also a revelation of the Holy Trinity. St. Gregory Palamas wrote: "Both the Father and the Holy Spirit were invisibly with the Lord, the one witnessing with his voice that this was his beloved Son, the other shining forth together with him through the luminous cloud and indicating the unified oneness of the light of the Son both with him and with the Father."

Jesus' Transfiguration was therefore also a revelation of the Kingdom of God because as Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas explains: "In the dazzling light, in which the very mountain and all the surroundings were altered, there is a glimpse of the transfigured world (cosmos), when God will be all in all, when the Kingdom is finally established."

Jesus again confronted a lack of faith among His followers. His Disciples were unable to exorcise a demon from a young man, and even the boy's father — who brought his son to Jesus — doubted whether Jesus had the ability to exorcise the demon. Jesus laments their faithlessness (vs. 19), comments that all things are possible to those who believe (vs. 23), and yet again experienced faithlessness in His Disciples when they still refused to accept that Jesus would die and rise again. All of these things point to the need to cry out with the father of the demonized boy, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (vs. 24)!

Jesus first taught the Disciples that they must avoid pride and greed in their lives. Rather than fulfilling their calling as disciples so that they could receive status and recognition for their accomplishments, Christians should be like young children: innocent and unconcerned with things like status (vv. 33-37, 42). The Shepherd of Hermas explains: "Thy are as veritable infants, whose hearts do not invent evil, who hardly know what corruption is, and who have remained childlike forever. People such as these, therefore, undoubtedly dwell in the kingdom of God, because they in no way defile God's commandments."

Jesus next confronted the danger of sectarianism (a sect is a group that separates itself from all others, often viewing itself as good and all others as evil) when His Disciples were concerned that individuals who were not directly following Jesus were nonetheless able to exorcise demons in His name (which, ironically, the Disciples themselves had just been unable to do). Jesus simply responded, "He who is not against us is on our side" (vs. 42).

Jesus went on to explain that Christians should leave and avoid anything that tempts us to sin (vv. 43-48). He did not mean to literally dismember ourselves: instead, he used such shocking imagery to reinforce how thoroughly we should refuse to let anything come between God and us. He already said that Christians should not value their lives more than Him (see 8:35-36); later in this Gospel He will similarly warn that we should not love our possessions (10:21), or even our family (10:28), more than we love God.

A QUICK TIP FOR YOUR LIFE TRANSFIGURE

The Church Fathers often point out that the Transfiguration occurred as Jesus prayed. Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow explains how this applies to us:

Pray, Christian, fervently and with the whole might of thy soul, pray diligently and perseveringly, pray rightly and purely; and if thou art not thyself equal to it, then pray for prayer itself, and by prayer thou wilt first obtain true and effectual prayer, and then this prayer shall overcome all things with thee and obtain all things for thee; it will guide thee unto Mount Tabor or create a Tabor within thee; it will call thy soul into heaven.

