

Last Sunday After Epiphany, February 3, 2008, Year A

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector      Scripture: Matthew 17:1-9

***"His Glory - Revealed"***

For many years I have had this T-Shirt – one of the very first Christian T-Shirts that I ever purchased. And fittingly – on Super Bowl Sunday – it just happens to be football themed: It simply says – **"It's not who wins – It's who gets the Glory!"** Tell that to the Patriots and Giants!

Glory is a tough one. I really don't think that we truly have a clue about how huge God's Glory is. Can you just imagine standing face to face with the Creator of the Universe? It stirs the imagination to wonder how bright the light of His countenance must be. To borrow a phrase from the 60's – "it blows my mind" to even try to clearly picture what this scene from today's Gospel must have been like. Just listen to these words: *"And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white."* (Matthew 17:2) Jesus' appearance was changed - to something so bright and so glorious. I don't think there are words big enough to describe the awe that Peter, James and John must have experienced that day, on that mountain. When Moses spoke to the presence of the Lord God in the Holy of Holies, according to the Book of Exodus – *"he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.* (Exodus 34:34-35) **Just being in the presence of God was enough to make Moses shine** (remember that because we will come back to that in a moment) – but can you imagine the Light coming from the source of that Power? We have such a difficult time imagining the brilliance of that light because we don't have anything that we can relate or compare it to. There on that mountain – amongst witnesses – the Glory of God – His awesome, beautiful Glory – was revealed.

Jesus stood, flanked by two of the most holy people in all of Scripture – Moses and Elijah. Here was the fulfillment of the promise of God – His Holy and Anointed One – The Messiah and Savior of mankind – standing next to Moses – the receiver of the Law, and Elijah – one of God's most revered Prophets.

It's easy to look at this whole scene and jump right in and say –

- "Oh, I get it – Jesus – the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets!"
- You may even conclude that Jesus *"face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white"* (Matthew 17:2) to show us of His Divinity
- And you would not be alone in that thinking.

But I want to suggest to you that Jesus told us the shining brilliance wasn't only a sign of His divinity – instead He promised that *"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"* (Matthew 13:43) Moses and Elijah shone brightly as well. The Gospel of Luke 9:30 says this of this very same incident: *"Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus."* Moses and Elijah are not divine – but remember – just being in the presence of God is enough to make one shine – and that is why Jesus said of the righteous - that they *"will shine like the sun"* – and God willing, so too will we in His presence.

What Peter, James and John witnessed that day, on that mountain – was a truly blessed event – in which Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, was seen in radiant Glory, and of whom God the Father spoke once again, saying: *"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"* (Matthew 17:5) Very powerful words – but please remember for me the last three words that God said. We will return to them later.

If absolute proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ is what you are looking for – it won't be found only on this mountain, not on this hill, not on this day. Instead, we also need to look for the divinity of Jesus Christ on the hill called Calvary, in the Moriah region – in Jerusalem. Because there, an incredible parallel unfolds – we find:

- Instead of Jesus' clothes shining a “*dazzling white*” His body is stripped and “*they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*” (Matthew 27:35)
- Instead of a bright and shiny scene - “*darkness came over all the land.*” (Matthew 27:45)
- Jesus on that hill, instead of being flanked by two great men of God – “*two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.*” (Matthew 27:38)
- These two robbers were not representative of the Law and the Prophets, instead they are representative of all of humanity – and how mankind would react to the Messiah. One of them would reject, insult and scorn Jesus, while the other one would seek His mercy, forgiveness and love.
- At the scene of the Transfiguration, Peter proclaims how wonderful it all is, while at the crucifixion – he is hiding in shame after denying that he even knows Jesus.
- On this hillside it is not the voice of God Almighty that is heard proclaiming the identity of His Son, but instead it is the voice of a Roman soldier – a pagan centurion, who exclaimed “*Surely this man was the Son of God!*” (Mark 15:39)

My brothers and sisters in Christ, for us to truly see the divinity of Jesus Christ – for us to see His Glory – Revealed – we need to look at **BOTH the mountaintop and the hillside** – for one clearly shows us the **vision of His almighty and awesome power**, while the **other shows us the depth of His mercy and love**. A love so incredibly profound:

- that He would offer Himself as a sacrifice - in our place;
- That He would take our punishment upon Himself.
- No mere man can do that –
- No mere man would want to!
- The only one who could - or would want to - is God Himself!

We are unmistakably given the evidence – and for us to see it:

- We must not only look at the baby in the manger, but
- We must also look at the grown One who hung on the cross.
- We must never forget
  - That His life was LIVED completely and totally for us –
  - Just as His life was GIVEN completely and totally for us.
    - **You can never separate the two:**
    - Jesus of Nazareth lived, was put to death on the cross, and rose from the grave, victorious over sin and death. **That is His Glory –revealed!**

We can only attempt to measure human glory by human standards. God's glory is a heavenly standard – and there is absolutely nothing that can match it; we have nothing at all to compare it to. As I alluded to earlier – it's one of those things that give you a headache because it is totally beyond our imagination or understanding. I don't know about you – but I really long for the day when we will stand before Him and witness His Glory.

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Just days before the Transfiguration – God gave to Peter the wisdom to see Jesus - as the Christ, the Messiah, the only Son of the Living God. Jesus responded by acknowledging that truth is as solid as a rock - and proclaiming that upon that rock of truth - His Church would be built. From that day forward, things would never be the same for Jesus or His disciples – as they drew closer and closer to the fulfillment of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection – all for mankind – and for the Glory of God. God gave Peter, James, and John a glimpse of what no living person had ever seen – the vision of Himself – shining like the heavens – and hearing God’s heavenly voice, instructing humanity how to respond.

But you know, these are instructions Israel had heard before – but they had gone unheeded. God first gave this instruction to Moses, and he relayed it to Israel in his words spoken in Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses said “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. **You must listen to him.***”

And then on that day, on that mountaintop – in front of the three witnessing disciples - when Moses once again met God face to face – the voice from the cloud drew attention to Jesus – just as Peter had done at Caesarea Philippi, proclaiming Him as not “a prophet” – but God’s own Son. **God tells all humanity that He is delighted with what Jesus is doing.**

God said to Israel, to the disciples – and to us today: If you want to find the way, the way to God, the way to the promise of eternal life, you have to recognize Jesus as His Son, as “*the Way, the Truth and the Life*” (John 14:6) and **we must “Listen to Him!”**

In closing – as we prepare for Lent, which begins this Wednesday, I have a very important question to ask you. **What do other people think when they look at your life?**

- Will they see someone who is listening to Jesus?
- Will they see someone who follows Him as their Lord?
- Will they see someone who lets the love and light of Christ shine in them?
- Are they likely to give God glory for what they see?

Everything that you have and that you are is from God. All your gifts, talents, abilities, even your possessions, are yours solely because God has allowed them into your life. When you put to use those resources for His kingdom, for His purposes, **then God receives all the glory,** and then **we truly see His Glory Revealed.**