

Saint Thomas explains the 2nd Sunday of Lent

And after six days Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow. And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him. And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. And as he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him. And the disciples hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid. And Jesus came and touched them: and said to them, Arise, and fear not. And they lifting up their eyes saw no one but only Jesus. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying: Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen from the dead. (Matthew 17: 1-9)

REMIG; In this Transfiguration undergone on the mount, the Lord fulfilled within six days the promise made to His disciples, that they should have a sight of His glory; as it is said, And after six days he took Peter, and James, and John his brother.

JEROME; It is made a question how it could be after six days that He took them, when Luke says eight. The answer is easy, that here one reckoned only the intervening days, there the first and the last are also added.

CHRYSTUS; He does not take them up immediately upon the promise being made, but six days after, for this reason, that the other disciples might not be touched with any human passion, as a feeling of jealousy; or else that during these days' space, those disciples who were to be taken up might become kindled with a more eager desire.

RABAN; Justly was it after six days that He showed His glory, because after six ages is to be the resurrection.

ORIGEN; Or because in six days this whole visible world was made; so he who is above all the things of this world, may ascend into the high mountain, and there see the glory of the Word of God.

CHRYSTUS; He took these three because He set them before others. But observe how Matthew does not conceal who were preferred to himself; the like does John also when he records the preeminent praise given to Peter. For the company of Apostles was free from jealousy and vain glory.

HILARY; In the three thus taken up with Him, the election of people out of the three stocks of Sem, Cam, and Japhet is figured.

RABAN; Or; He took only three disciples with Him, because many are called but few chosen. Or because they who now hold in incorrupt mind the faith of the Holy Trinity, shall then joy in the everlasting beholding of it.

REMIG; When the Lord was about to show His disciples the glory of His brightness, He led them into the mountain, as it follows, And he took them up into the high mountain apart. Herein teaching, that it is necessary for all who seek to contemplate God, that they

should not grovel in weak pleasures, but by love of things above should be ever raising themselves towards heavenly things; and to show His disciples that they should not look for the glory of the divine brightness in the gulf of the present world, but in the kingdom of the heavenly blessedness. He leads them apart because the saints are separated from the wicked by their whole soul and devotion of their faith, and shall be utterly separated in the future; or because many are called but few chosen. It follows, And he was transfigured before them.

JEROME; Such as He is to be in the time of the Judgment, such was He now seen of the Apostles. Let none suppose that He lost His former form and lineaments, or laid aside His bodily reality, taking upon Him a spiritual or ethereal Body. How His transfiguration was accomplished, the Evangelist shows, saying, And his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment became white as snow. For that His face is said to shine, and His raiment described to become white, does not take away substance, but confer glory. In truth, the Lord was transformed into that glory in which He shall hereafter come in His Kingdom. The transformation enhanced the brightness, but did not destroy the countenance, although the body was spiritual; whence also His raiment was changed and became white to such a degree, as in the expression of another Evangelist, no fuller on earth can whiten them. But all this is the property of matter, and is the subject of the touch, not of spirit and ethereal, an illusion upon the sight only beheld in phantasm.

REMIG; If then the face of the Lord shone as the sun, and the saints shall shine as the sun, are then the brightness of the Lord and the brightness of His servants to be equal? By no means. But forasmuch as nothing is known more bright than the sun, therefore to give some illustration of the future resurrection, it is expressed to us that the brightness of the Lord's countenance, and the brightness of the righteous, shall be as the sun.

ORIGEN; Mystically; When any one has passed the six days according as we have said, he beholds Jesus transfigured before the eyes of his heart. For the Word of God has various forms, appearing to each man according as He knows that it will be expedient for him; and He shows Himself to none in a manner beyond his capacity; whence he says not simply, He was transfigured but, before them. For Jesus, in the Gospels, is merely understood by those who do not mount by means of exalting works and words upon the high mountain of wisdom; but to them that do mount up thus, He is no longer known according to the flesh, but is understood to be God the Word. Before these then Jesus is transfigured, and not before those who live sunk in worldly conversation.

But these, before whom He is transfigured, have been made sons of God, and He is shown to them as the Sun of righteousness. His raiment is made white as the light, that is, the words and sayings of the Gospels with which Jesus is clothed according to those things which were spoken of Him by the Apostles. Gross. Or; the raiment of Christ shadows out the saints, of whom Esaias says, With all these shall you clothe you as with a garment; and they are likened to snow because they shall be white with virtues, and all the heat of vices shall be put far away from them.

It follows, And there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with them.

CHRYST; There are many reasons why these should appear. The first is this; because the multitudes said He was Elias, or Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets, He here brings with Him the chief of the Prophets, that hence at least may be seen the difference between the servants and their Lord. Another reason is this, because the Jews were ever charging Jesus with being a transgressor of the Law and blasphemer, and usurping to Himself the glory of the Father, that He might prove Himself guiltless of both charges, He brings forward those who were eminent in both particulars; Moses, who gave the Law, and Elias, who was jealous for the glory of God. Another reason is, that they might learn that He has the power of life and death; by producing Moses, who was dead, and Elias, who had not yet experienced death.

A further reason also the Evangelist discovers, that He might show the glory of His cross, and thus soothe Peter, and the other disciples, who were fearing His death; for they talked, as another Evangelist declares, of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Wherefore He brings forward those who had exposed themselves to death for God's pleasure, and for the people that believed; for both had willingly stood before tyrants, Moses before Pharaoh, Elias before Ahab. Lastly, also, He brings them forward, that the disciples should emulate their privileges, and be meek as Moses, and zealous as Elias.

HILARY; Also that Moses and Elias only out of the whole number of the saints stood with Christ, means, that Christ, in His kingdom, is between the Law and the Prophets; for He shall judge Israel in the presence of the same by whom He was preached to them.

ORIGEN; However, if any man discerns a spiritual sense in the Law agreeing with the teaching of Jesus, and in the Prophets finds the hidden wisdom of Christ, he beholds Moses and Elias in the same glory with Jesus.

JEROME; It is to be remembered also, that when the Scribes and Pharisees asked signs from heaven, He would not give any; but now, to increase the Apostles' faith, He gives a sign; Elias descends from heaven, whither he was gone up, and Moses arises from hell; as Ahaz is bidden by Esaias to ask him a sign in the heaven above, or in the depth beneath.

CHRYST; Hereupon follows what the warm Peter spoke, Peter answered and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. Because he had heard that He must go up to Jerusalem, he yet fears for Christ; but after his rebuke he dares not again say, Be propitious to yourself, Lord, but suggests the same covertly under other guise. For seeing in this place great quietness and solitude, he thought that this would be a fit place to take up their abode in, saying, Lord, it is good for us to be here. And he sought to remain here ever, therefore he proposes the tabernacles, If you will, let us make here three tabernacles. For he concluded if he should do this, Christ would not go up to Jerusalem, and if He should not go up to Jerusalem, He should not die, for he knew that there the Scribes laid wait for Him.

REMIG; Otherwise; at this view of the majesty of the Lord, and His two servants, Peter was so delighted, that, forgetting every thing else in the world, he would abide here for ever. But if Peter was then so fired with admiration, what ravishment will it not be to behold the King in His proper beauty, and to mingle in the choir of the Angels, and of all

the saints? In that Peter says, Lord, if you will, he shows the submission of a dutiful and obedient servant.

JEROME; Yet art you wrong, Peter, and as another Evangelist says, knows not what you say. Think not of three tabernacles, when there is but one tabernacle of the Gospel in which both Law and Prophets are to be repeated. But if you wilt have three tabernacles, set not the servants equal with their Lord, but make three tabernacles, yea make one for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that They whose divinity is one, may have but one tabernacle, in your bosom.

REMIG; He was wrong moreover, in desiring that the kingdom of the elect should be set up on earth, when the Lord had promised to give it in heaven. He was wrong also in forgetting that himself and his fellows were mortal, and in desiring to come to eternal felicity without taste of death.

RABAN; Also in supposing that tabernacles were to be built for conversation in heaven, in which houses are not needed, as it is written in the Apocalypse, I saw not any temple therein.

JEROME; While they thought only of an earthly tabernacle of boughs or tents, they are overshadowed by the covering of a bright cloud; While he yet spoke, there came a bright cloud and overshadowed them.

CHRYSTUS; When the Lord threatens, He shows a dark cloud, as on Sinai; but here where He sought not to terrify but to teach, there appeared a bright cloud.

ORIGEN; The bright cloud overshadowing the Saints is the Power of the Father, or perhaps the Holy Spirit; or I may also venture to call the Savior that bright cloud which overshadows the Gospel, the Law, and the Prophets, as they understand who can behold His light in all these three.

JEROME; Forasmuch as Peter had asked unwisely, he deserves not any answer; but the Father makes answer for the Son, that the Lord's word might be fulfilled, He that sent me, he bears witness of me.

CHRYSTUS; Neither Moses, nor Elias speak, but the Father greater than all sends a voice out of the cloud, that the disciples might believe that this voice was from God. For God has ordinarily shown Himself in a cloud, as it is written, Clouds and darkness are round about Him; and this is what is said, Behold, a voice out of the cloud.

JEROME; The voice of the Father is heard speaking from heaven, giving testimony to the Son, and teaching Peter the truth, taking away his error, and through Peter the other disciples also; whence he proceeds, This is my beloved Son. For Him make the tabernacle, Him obey; this is the Son, they are but servants; and they also ought as you to make ready a tabernacle for the Lord in the inmost parts of their heart.

CHRYSTUS. Fear not then, Peter; for if God is mighty, it is manifest that the Son is also mighty; wherefore if He is loved, fear not you; for none forsakes Him whom He loves; nor cost you love Him equally with the Father. Neither does He love Him merely because He begot Him, but because He is of one will with Himself; as it follows, In whom I am well pleased; which is to say, in whom I rest content, whom I accept, for all things of the Father

He performs with care, and His will is one with the Father; so if He will to be crucified, do not then speak against it.

HILARY; This is the Son, this the Beloved, this the Accepted; and He it is who is to be heard, as the voice out of the cloud signifies, saying, Hear you Him. For He is a fit teacher of doing the things He has done, who has given the weight of His own example to the loss of the world, the joy of the cross, the death of the body, and after that the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

REMIG; He says therefore, Hear you Him, as much as to say, Let the shadow of the Law be past, and the types of the Prophets, and follow you the one shining light of the Gospel. Or He says, Hear you Him, to show that it was He whom Moses had foretold, The Lord your God shall raise up a Prophet to you of your brethren like to me, Him shall you hear. Thus the Lord had witnesses on all sides; from heaven the voice of the Father, Elias out of Paradise, Moses out of Hades, the Apostles from among men, that at the name of Jesus every thing should bow the knee, of things in heaven, things on earth, and things beneath.

ORIGEN; The voice out of the cloud speaks either to Moses or Elias, who desired to see the Son of God, and to hear Him; or it is for the teaching of the Apostles.

GLOSS; It is to be observed, that the mystery of the second regeneration, that, to wit, which shall be in the resurrection, when the flesh shall be raised again, agrees well with the mystery of the first which is in baptism, when the soul is raised again. For in the baptism of Christ is shown the working of the whole Trinity; there was the Son incarnate, the Holy Ghost appearing in the figure of a dove, and the Father made known by the voice. In like manner in the transfiguration, which is the sacrament of the second regeneration, the whole Trinity appeared; the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, and the Holy Spirit in the cloud. It is made a question how the Holy Spirit was shown there in the dove, here in the cloud. Because it is His manner to mark His gifts by specific outward forms. And the gift of baptism is innocence, which is denoted by the bird of purity. But as in the resurrection, He is to give splendor and refreshment, therefore in the cloud are denoted both the refreshment and the brightness of the rising bodies. It follows, And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and feared greatly.

JEROME; Their cause of terror is threefold. Because they knew that they had done amiss; or because the bright cloud had covered them; or because they had heard the voice of God the Father speaking; for human frailty cannot endure to look upon so great glory, and falls to the earth trembling through both soul and body. And by how much higher any one has aimed, by so much lower will be his fall, if he shall be ignorant of his own measure.

REMIG; Whereas the holy Apostles fell upon their faces, that was a proof of their sanctity, for the saints are always described to fall upon their faces, but the wicked to fall backwards.

CHRYST; But when before in Christ's baptism, such a voice came from heaven, yet none of the multitude then present suffered any thing of this kind, how is it that the disciples on the mount fell prostrate? Because in truth their solicitude was much, the height and

loneliness of the spot great, and the transfiguration itself attended with terrors, the clear light and the spreading cloud; all these things together wrought to terrify them.

JEROME; And whereas they were laid down, and could not raise themselves again, He approaches them, touches them gently, that by His touch their fear might be banished, and their unnerved limbs gain strength; And Jesus drew near, and touched them. But He further added His word to His hand, And said to them, Arise, fear not. He first banishes their fear, that He may after impart teaching.

It follows, And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only; which was done with good reason; for had Moses and Elias continued with the Lord, it might have seemed uncertain to which in particular the witness of the Father was borne. Also they see Jesus standing after the cloud has been removed, and Moses and Elias disappeared, because after the shadow of the Law and Prophets has departed, both are found in the Gospel.

It follows; And as they came down from the mount, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell no man this vision, until the Son of Man shall rise from the dead. He will not be preached among the people, lest the marvel of the thing should seem incredible, and lest the cross following after so great glory should cause offense.

REMIG; Or, because if His majesty should be published among the people, they should hinder the dispensation of His passion, by resistance to the chief Priests; and thus the redemption of the human race should suffer impediment.

HILARY; He enjoins silence respecting what they had seen, for this reason, that when they should be filled with the Holy Spirit, they should then become witnesses of these spiritual deeds.

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