

OPENING COLLECT

Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross: give us grace to perceive his glory, that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Exodus 24.12–18

12 The LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’ 13 So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. 14 To the elders he had said, ‘Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.’ 15 Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. 17 Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. 18 Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

The Gospel for today is the story of the Transfiguration, and so, here, we read the story of Moses meeting God on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 24. After ‘forty days and nights’, which simply means ‘a long time’ he takes the Ten Commandments to the people and finds, on his return, that they have been misbehaving. Later chapters (32-4) tell how he goes and gets them again, and when he returns his face is shining. The full story, as told in Exodus, underlines the special relationship Moses had with God (his face shone from the encounter), but also reminds us how demanding his work was with the people, throughout the long period (forty years!) that they were in the Wilderness. It must have been far more attractive, to Moses, to have stayed on the mountain with God, than to return to his job, leading the quarrelsome people! Rather like enjoying the church service but not engaging with the world!

SECOND READING: 2 Peter 1.16–21

16 We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

This selected passage from 2 Peter seems to recall the writer’s experience of the Transfiguration, seeing Jesus Christ in glory and hearing the voice saying “This is my Son”. For the writer, this experience confirms all that he had read in the prophets about the Messiah, and so he commends those writings to the young church. Be “attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place” he says. Glimpses of the glory of God do not come often, but the words of those “moved by the Holy spirit” and speaking “from God”, can be such glimpses, and are always available to us. The Word of God can be a real source of strength to disciples, as each grapples with living the gospel of love in a troubled world.

Gospel: Matthew 17.1–9

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

1 Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ 5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’ 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’ 8 And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’

John’s gospel does not include the story of the Transfiguration. For John, every word of Jesus and his every deed reveal the glory of God, and his death is the supreme moment of glory. For the Synoptics, however, the Transfiguration has an important part to play in Jesus’ story. It happens, in Matthew’s context, just after the disciples have recognised who Jesus is, at ‘Caesarea Phillippi’. However, they do not seem to fully understand for they then try to stop Jesus from walking towards the cross. That, though, is the way Jesus must go. Son of God and friend of Moses and Elijah he may be, but there can be no ‘abiding on the mountain’. Dear old Peter, that is where he would like to be! “I will make three dwellings here”, he says. But Jesus must come down from the mountain, and get bruised and mocked, and die in Jerusalem, before, having been raised from the dead, his true glory can once again be seen. The thrust of the collects is that if we walk the same selfless way, we too can reveal the glory of God and be centres of transfiguration. Can you see that glory in the face of your neighbour? Does your life reveal that glory, and enhance the life of others? And can you face the cost?

Post-Communion Collect

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ: may we who are partakers at his table reflect his life in word and deed, that all the world may know his power to change and save. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**