

In Nomine Iesu

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany 2024 Matthew 17:1-9 – If God is for us, who can be against us?

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as light. And behold, there appeared Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If You wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell no one the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God with us and God for us. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

“And after six days ...” That is, six days after Jesus and His disciples had come into the region of Caesarea Philippi, about 20 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Six days after Jesus had asked the twelve, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?” Six days after He, having heard what they reported the people to be saying, asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Six days after Peter answered with his great confession of faith, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:13-16) Six days after Jesus had told them that He would go to Jerusalem and there be crucified and die, to which Peter had answered, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You,” Six days after Jesus had replied to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

I

Who do the people say that I am? The twelve told Him what they’d heard. I’m sure the people of Galilee gave as many opinions then as the people of Tacoma would today. People will give their opinion about God when asked by their friends and neighbors, even if they know little. After all, everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, right?

But who do you say that I am? The question sounded different when asked by the Christ Himself. And Peter did not answer with his own opinion. He gave the answer of the Old Testament prophets, the answer of John the Baptist. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew writes, “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Matthew 16:21) Hearing what Jesus said was coming, Peter answered not with the Old Testament prophets or John the Baptist, but with his own opinion. “Far be it from You, Lord! This shall never happen to You!” (Matthew 16:22) After all, everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, right?

Jesus answered Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.” (Matthew 16:23)

“And after six days” the Lord led three of His disciples. Peter, James, and John, up a high mountain and was transfigured before them. Six days earlier Peter had confessed,

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. In that moment, he saw Jesus clearly for who He was. He saw Jesus as the Old Testament prophets saw Him, as John the Baptist saw Him. He gave as His answer not his opinion, but the certainty of God's word. Then Jesus began to show them that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised again the third day. But to this Peter offered his own opinion - one, as Jesus pointed out, he shared with Satan.

“And after six days” Peter sees Jesus on the mountain, flesh as his flesh, and yet with the glory of the eternal God of heaven and earth **upon Him, within Him, streaming from Him.** Peter saw the same incarnate God with whom he had presumed to argue six days before standing between Moses and Elijah, standing as it were in the midst of the Law and the Prophets, and heard them discussing the path (Luke 9:31 uses the Greek word *exodus*) Jesus would follow. It would be an exodus that led through Jerusalem to betrayal, suffering, and death, and from there to the promised land of heaven. And, let us take note again that Peter resists. “Lord it is good that we are here. If you wish I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah,” as if to say, “let's stay here and not go to Jerusalem, not suffer those terrible things.” And once more Peter is rebuked. But this time the rebuke is far more powerful than the last, and yet at the same time gentler. This time Peter is answered by the Father in heaven, the One who sent His only Son because He so loved the world. He says to Peter: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. **Hear Him.**”

II

“See here, dear Peter, this is My beloved Son whom I have known and loved before the world was, from eternity. Today, unlike when Abraham stood on another mountain with knife in hand raised over Isaac, there is no angel to stay My hand. There is no ram in the thicket to be My Son's substitute. This One whom you have walked with, He is the Ram in the thicket. He is caught and held fast there by the power of My love for you and for all who are lost like you. Him I must sacrifice so that the descendents of Abraham may be set free. Him I must let go to Jerusalem, and there suffer many things, the torment of hell and the shame of crucifixion, so that you might have a place on My holy mountain forever and ever. So, dear Peter, see what joy and peace Moses and Elijah have in His presence. You hear them speak of His suffering and death, but they see beyond that. For they know the joy and peace that never ends, which comes to them for the sake of the great atoning sacrifice of Him John called “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” They see the day the Lord has made, and it is marvelous in their eyes. They foresaw the day of My Son's suffering and death, and wrote of it. So listen, dear Peter, listen to My Son. His words are My words. What He calls good is good, even if you do not fully understand. For He is My beloved Son, His will is My will. He will lay down His life of His own accord. And He will take it up again. In Him My wrath toward your sin and sin of all will be stilled. He will pay the penalty you have earned. And then you will be Mine once again and forever. Your place on My mountain will be secure.

With the revelation they saw on the mountain and the words of the Father from heaven, the disciples accompanied their Lord to Jerusalem, as prepared for the coming mystery of the atonement as it is possible for sinful man to be. They walked from there in faith, trusting that what God said through His Son is good, no matter what their eyes and heart say. They went from there knowing that if God is for us, who can be against us.

The Transfiguration, coming as it does as this time of the church year, serves the same purpose for us today. Next Sunday and the two that follow it are the “Gesima” Sundays, the turning point toward Jerusalem and the many things Christ our Lord must suffer for us. Ash Wednesday and the forty days – not counting the Sundays! - until Easter follow.

The cross and what lies beyond it are our strength for the forty-day fast. For if this Jesus who gave His life for us is the Father's Son who so pleased Him, then we too, through faith in Him, shall be the Father's sons and He will be well-pleased with us. If God is so very much for us, that He gave His only begotten Son into death, who or what can be against us? Dear friends, let this be your opinion, your faith, **your confession**.

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Join Peter, James, and John, and walk the path of Jesus' exodus to Jerusalem, Calvary, and beyond. Hear His gracious words and know that everything He calls good is good. Everything He says is true, is true. Every promise He makes to you, He will keep. Look and see beside Him on the mountain, yes, Peter, James, and John, but also Moses and Elijah, the witnesses of the Old Testament. For their very presence on the mountain that day, their very presence in heaven, stands as testimony to us all, proof to us that if God be for us, who can be against us? Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria