

This is the last Sunday of Epiphany. Epiphany is the season when we focus on the glory of God being made visible in Jesus Christ. Just a few moments ago, we heard Luke’s account of the Transfiguration, when Jesus’ glory shone forth in a very visible way. But to understand our Gospel lesson, it’s important to look back to our OT lesson from Exodus ch34 (bulletins).

We pick up the story when Moses is coming down from Mt. Sinai the second time. The first time, he spent 40 days on the mountain. God gave him the tablets with the 10 Commandments. But when Moses came down, the people had made an idol, the golden calf, and were worshiping it. Moses was so disgusted that he broke the tablets with the 10 Commandments on them.

So now, Moses has gone up the mountain a second time for another 40 day period. And now he’s coming down a second time, with a new copy of the tablets with the 10 Commandments. We pick it up with ch34 v29:

“29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.”

Now being afraid is probably a natural reaction on their part. I’ve seen plenty of science fiction movies. If somebody walks up to you and they’re glowing in the dark, you probably want to keep your distance. People with glowing faces are not normal. In fact, Moses is the only one mentioned in the OT.

But it brings up the question, why? Why is Moses’ face glowing after talking with God? Apparently, a little bit of God’s glory has rubbed off on Moses.

The chapter before, Moses had asked to see God’s glory face to face. God told him, ‘No, that’d be overwhelming.’ But in very anthropomorphic language, he does tell Moses to hide in cleft in the cliff. God will pass by and shield Moses from most of his glory. Then he’ll let Moses have the tiniest tangential peak of the backside of God’s glory after he’s passed by.

But apparently, it’s enough to make Moses’ face shine. And when Moses comes down from the mountain, it’s enough to make all the people very nervous. So, v33, Moses starts wearing a veil to protect the people from the little tiny piece of God’s glory that’s rubbed off on his face. He takes the veil off to talk to God, and puts it back on when he deals with the people.

Moses has just a little bit of second-hand glory that shows on his face. But it’s enough to freak people out. God is known by his glory. And just a little bit has rubbed off on Moses. Which brings us to our Gospel-- Luke ch9 v28:

“Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on THE mountain to pray.”

Notice which mountain. Luke doesn’t say, “A mountain.” He says “THE mountain.” In scripture, THE mountain is an allusion to Mt. Sinai, the place where you meet God. Now Luke isn’t making a geographical statement here. There’s no way that Jesus and the disciples could have hiked down to THE Mt. Sinai in 8 days. But Luke is making a spiritual statement. By saying, THE mountain, it means that there’s going to be an encounter with God on top. And sure enough there is, but not in the way the 3 disciples expect.

When they’re on top of THE mountain, Jesus is praying. And “And while he was praying, (v29) the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.” Matthew says a little more. He says that Jesus’ face “shone like the sun.” His face is shining with glory. But this is more than the little bit of glory that was reflected on Moses face. This glory is apparently from within. Jesus’ glory is enough to make even his clothes glow.

This is an incredible, overwhelming, confusing vision for the disciples. They catch a deeper glimpse of who Jesus is. Yes, he is a real human being. But there's more. God's glory shines out from him as well.

The disciples leave the mountain behind. The disciples leave the vision behind. Does it stick with them? Does it make any difference in their lives?

Long term, yes. But short term, it doesn't look like it. Just a few weeks later, Jesus is arrested. What do the disciples do? Peter denies even knowing Jesus, and the others turn tail and run. They get a look at the glory of God shining out from Jesus, and they apparently go on like nothing happened.

Of course, we often have the same problem. We get a glimpse of God's glory here and there, but then forget it and go about our business as usual. We forget what an awesome gift we are given. We are able to see God's face made visible in the human face of Jesus Christ. That's something Moses was not able to do on Mt. Sinai.

The face of Jesus Christ is God's face made fully known and present in the world. And we can know him still. We can know him as he is revealed in Holy Scripture. We can know him as he is revealed in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. And we can know him as he is present in the midst of his Body, the church. These are all incredible gifts, and we shouldn't take them for granted.

God glory is made visible. God is made knowable in Jesus Christ. That's tremendously Good News for us. But as the TV commercials say, “Wait. There's more.” There's a special bonus offer. There's an additional free gift. It's something that's usually off of Western Christians' radar screens. But it's huge in Eastern Orthodox theology. They call it theosis. And that's what Paul is talking about in our Epistle lesson this morning. 2Corinthians ch3.

Paul is using the same image from Exodus of Moses and the veil. v13 He remembers how Moses had to put the veil over his face to protect the people of Israel from God's glory.

But then in v16, he says that when one turns to Jesus, that veil is removed. The roadblock is removed. That's Good News. But wait, there's even more.

v18 Paul says, that all of us with our unveiled faces can see the glory of the Lord. And the word translated as “seeing” here can also be translated “reflecting.” So Paul says, we're either seeing the glory of the lord or reflecting the glory of the Lord.

But then, the amazing news in the middle of v18. We are also being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Not only do we see or reflect God’s glory. We’re also being changed by it. We’re being changed by God to be more and more like Jesus Christ, to reflect more and more of his glory.

That’s the promise God gives us. Not only can we see his glory. One day, we will be transformed. One day, we will share his glory.

One day, we will be transfigured ourselves, and be changed into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The glory that shone from within him on the holy mountain will one day shine forth from us. That's tremendous news. That's a wonderful gift and promise about the future.

But the charge is often leveled at Christianity that it's all about future gratification. Marx famously called religion "the opiate of the masses." He asserted that talk of future hope allowed the powerful to abuse the downtrodden, numbing them to their present condition. You may suffer now, but you'll get rewarded later. Pie in the sky, by and by.

But promises of future glory have important ramifications in the way we treat each other now.

C.S. Lewis speaks of our future transformation as Christians, and the glory we will have. He says, "The dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship."¹

He further says, "Your Christian neighbor... is holy in almost the same way as (the Blessed Sacrament), for in him (in your fellow Christian), Christ (who is) Glory Himself, is truly (present)."²

Because of that, Lewis says, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations-- these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit."³

¹ C.S. Lewis *The Weight of Glory* 14-15

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

C.S. Lewis's point is that our future glory carries a tremendous weight of responsibility now. Because we are so valuable in God's sight, because we have such a wonderful future in store for us, we need to begin to treat each other better and love each other more, now.

In his words, "The load, or weight, or burden, of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken."⁴

That's a startling, unsettling, and yet wonderful assertion. Remember who your neighbor is, and act accordingly. The people you go to church with and may find difficult to deal with—remember who they really are. The people you encounter at school, at work—remember who they really are. The people struggling and suffering in Haiti, in the Middle East, in Lubbock, Texas—remember who they really are. These are people you'll be spending eternity with. These are people who will one day shine from within, filled with the fullness of Christ's glory. These are people for whom Christ died. These are people he will one day transform to such a degree that if they walked up to you in their future, glorified state, you'd be tempted to bow down and worship them.

So live differently now. Treat people differently now. Be vessels and beacons and reflectors of Christ's glory. Shine in this world as you will shine in the next.

Moses' only got to reflect a small part of God's glory.

The disciples only got a brief glimpse of God's glory in Jesus Christ.

But we are given the opportunity to bask in Christ's glory, and reflect it to those around us. We are invited to undertake Christ's transforming work, and to be transformed ourselves. We are promised that we will see his glorious face, and that his light will shine from us.

During communion (at the late service) we'll sing these marvelous words:

⁴ *ibid.*

*O wondrous type! O vision fair
of glory that the Church may share,
which Christ upon the mountain shows,
where brighter than the sun he glows!*

*With shining face and bright array,
Christ deigns to manifest today
what glory shall be theirs above
who joy in God with perfect love.*

*O Father, with the eternal Son,
and Holy Spirit, ever One,
vouchsafe to bring us by thy grace
to see thy glory face to face.⁵*

In the name...

⁵ Hymn 137