

- Just a few chapters before our reading from Exodus, we hear *remarkable* words. "... Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up" the mountain, "**and they saw the God of Israel... they beheld God, and they ate and drank.**"¹ In this morning's reading, we hear about how **Moses' face is shining** when he comes down from speaking with God. The words imply that Moses has been in God's intimate presence, and that as a result of being **face to face with God**, the brightness of the divine presence is now imparted to him. **Moses is not aware of this** until he sees the reaction of others to his appearance. They are afraid to come near him because of **the shining brightness radiating from his face**. This is worth noting because there is no similar indication of fear in the earlier story. For then, the **same** leaders of Israel **had seen God** on the mountaintop.
- According to today's reading, **Moses started putting a veil over his face** when he would come down the mountain to speak to his fellow-Israelites.² But **he would not wear the veil when he talked with God**, up above. So, in this part of Exodus, the veil provided *protection*. It would *protect* those who were **unused to, or unprepared for**, the power of **God's immediate presence**. In our Epistle reading from second Corinthians, Paul **extends** and also **alters** this idea of **the veil**.³ Instead of it being a means to **protect** God's people from a direct encounter with divine glory, **the veil has become** in Paul's letter a kind of **impediment**. When our hearts and minds are *not* open to God, nor sensitive to God's power, **we become hardened**. We become *hardened* in such a way that **our hearts and minds are veiled**, preventing us from perceiving God's glory.
- But Christ **has set aside this veil**. As a result, "**all of us, with unveiled faces, {are} seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror.**" And **we "are being transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to **another**, for this comes from the Lord, *the Spirit*."⁴

- **The Transfiguration of Jesus is all about the *unveiling* of God's glory.** Jesus takes Peter, John and James up with him on a mountain to pray. While he is praying, the appearance of his face changes, as does his clothing. **In contrast with the Exodus and Pauline image of light reflecting off a surface, Luke presents God's glory as coming *from within* Jesus.** In other words, **his is *a radiating glory* rather than a *reflected* one.** Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah, who appear with him, **appear *in his glory*.** This may mean that Jesus has shared his glory with them in a way that *prefigures* what he will share with *all* of his followers.
- Luke says that **Moses and Elijah “*appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure*,”** which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Our translation here is not quite accurate, but you might not know this unless you are reading it in Greek. Literally, Luke tells us that **Moses and Elijah were speaking of his Exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.** *His Exodus*, not just in the passive sense of him becoming like those who were delivered from slavery and death through crossing the Red Sea from Egypt. But also in the sense of ***the new Exodus*** he would bring about for the sake of others, to release them from slavery to sin, and subject to death.
- **This helps us appreciate the significance of *the words from heaven* during the Transfiguration,** and how they differ from those heard at Jesus' Baptism. Luke records that, at Jesus' Baptism, the voice from heaven said, **“*You are* my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”⁵** *But here,* at Jesus' Transfiguration, the voice says, **“*This is* my Son, my Chosen; *listen to him!*”** Jesus' Transfiguration is *not so much for him*, as it is for those who *follow* him.
- **Perceiving this brings us back to Paul's words in second Corinthians.** And it should lead us to ask *a good question*: If we feel like there is a veil between us and the divine presence, ***where does this veil lie? Does God 'hide'***

behind a veil, either to *protect* us, or *challenge* us? Or is the veil *within ourselves*? Is it formed by our spiritual blindness and lack of openness to the glory imparted by the Spirit? Paul suggests that our experience may be like that of the earlier Israelites, for whom *hard-heartedness* caused them to be blind to the bright light of God's glorious presence, whether in Moses' face or when reading and hearing the Law. Hard-heartedness can be equally blinding for us, veiling the glory that is all around us.

- And *where*, according to Paul, *do we find this glory*? We find it in the faces of everyone who has been open to God's transforming Holy Spirit. In other words, *we find it in each other, as well as in ourselves*. For this reason it can be like *looking in a mirror*, as the glory that we will perceive in *others* is the same glory that they can perceive within *ourselves*.
- *Moses went into the Tabernacle to encounter God's glory*. And as both Jesus and Paul teach us, *we are now the 'temples' of God's tabernacling Spirit. We are therefore the dwelling places of God's own glory*. As we open ourselves to God's indwelling Spirit, the light of God's glory illuminates darkness, and burns away impurity. In the process, *we are being transformed into the glory in whose image we have been made, and toward the glory to which we are called*. God's presence within us is a transfiguring presence, allowing us to see –*however gradually*– we are being transformed *from* persons who expect only episodically to experience God's presence. And we are being transformed into persons *who embody* God's presence, wherever we are, and all the time.
- *I invite you to join me in praying together* our collect for the day, which is at the top of the Scripture insert: "O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: *Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be* strengthened to bear our cross, and be *changed into his likeness from glory to glory*;

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through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*"



James Tissot, *Moses and the Ten Commandments; The Transfiguration*

Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]

About eight days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

[On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.]

Notes:

¹ See Exodus 24:9-11 in context.

² Exodus 34:29-35

³ 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

⁴ From our Epistle reading.

⁵ Luke 3:22.