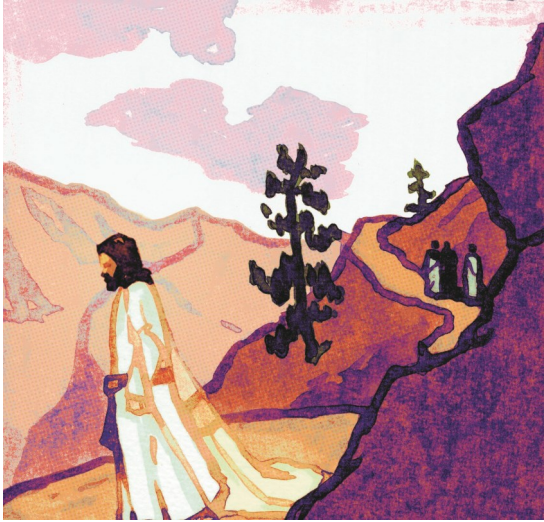


FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, the Church transfers its focus from the temptations of Jesus in the desert to the mystery of His Transfiguration. The Transfiguration of Jesus is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. This Sunday, we are going to look at the account of the Transfiguration in the Gospel of Mark.

Did you ever ask yourself why Jesus performed this miraculous revelation? Have you ever wondered why He chose only Peter, James, and John to go up the mountain and be witnesses? Is there a connection? Well, one of the early Church Fathers, named Ephrem the Syrian, has commented on just such questions. The Church Fathers were ancient, influential Christian theologians and writers who established the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity. The historical period in

which they worked became known as the Patristic Era and spans approximately from the late 1st to mid-8th centuries, flourishing during the 4th and 5th centuries, when Christianity was in the process of being established as the church of the Roman Empire.

Ephrem was a witness to early Christianity on the fringes of the Roman Empire. He wrote not long after the Council of Nicaea, and he wrote in Syriac, a Christian form of Aramaic, which is a language that Jesus and some of the apostles would have spoken. He was well-known for his poetry, exegetical and theological writings, and many of the hymns of the early Byzantine church. He is venerated as a saint by all traditional Churches, especially among Syriac Christians.

In his sermon on the Transfiguration, Ephrem says the following about the reasons Jesus' Transfiguration happened the way it did. "Jesus took the apostles up to the mountain for three reasons: first, to show them the glory of His divinity, then to declare himself Israel's redeemer... and thirdly to prevent the apostles' being scandalized at seeing Him soon afterward enduring those human sufferings which He had freely accepted for our sake... He took them up onto the mountain to show them his kingship before they witnessed his passion, to let them see His mighty power before they watched His death, to reveal His glory to them before they beheld His humiliation."

Again, who does Jesus take up the mountain? Peter, James, and John. Well, when the time comes for His Passion, who are the three apostles who witnessed His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane? Again, it is the same three: Peter, James, and John. They are, in a sense, the inner circle.

What Ephrem the Syrian is telling us is that Jesus did not want to scandalize the apostles when they saw Him in His weakness, in the fullness of His humanity in the Garden of Gethsemane, as His Passion began, and He took up the battle for our salvation. So first, Jesus took them up and gave them a foretaste of His glory and His divinity on the mountain of Transfiguration.

After being reminded of Jesus' glory and divinity that He showed to Peter, James, and John in the Gospel this Sunday, let us take courage as we continue our Lenten Journey. Remember that Jesus is in the desert of Lent with you now, fighting for you against the wild beasts, the seven capital sins that dwell in us. Remember in the temptations that you *will* experience in this time to lean on the Lord who wants to live in you. As St. Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Peace,