

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, February 15, 2015

## The Glory of New

2 Corinthians 3:12–18; 4:1–6



<sup>12</sup> Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Do you like it when you go to the food store and before you buy something you get to try it first? And maybe like some, you just tour around the store aisles just for the sake of tasting everything the store is offering you to try.

It is better if portions were big enough to allow you to make a decision about the product, but small enough to leave you wanting more. The manufacturers know that at least 20 percent of the time a sale is generated, and sometimes, with the right product, as much as 90 percent of shoppers purchase the item.

Car dealers have learned this trick too. It's one thing to walk around their lot and kick some tires, but if the salesman can get you to test-drive the newest model, he knows you'll begin to imagine yourself as the owner. He knows you won't be as excited to get back behind the wheel of your "clunker" and head for home. Hold on to your wallet! He's well on his way to closing the deal!

Today, we celebrate the Transfiguration of Our Lord, and we remember how three of Jesus' disciples were given a glimpse of Christ's unveiled glory. Therefore, in today's Epistle, St. Paul will help us understand what truly was taking place at this transfiguration. Basically the lesser was giving way to the greater. Come to find out, Moses and Elijah—the Law and the Prophets—are just the "free sample" or the "test

drive,” but Christ is the real thing! The “free samples,” the “test drive,” the Old Covenant finds its fulfillment in Christ, the new covenant, the real thing we see the Glory of the New!

### **I. The old covenant is fading away.**

The Old Testament Law and Prophets were given to point to Christ. They never were an end in themselves, but merely served Israel as a teacher and a guardian until Christ came. Well, that time has come, so here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, whom do we see with Jesus in his unveiled glory. Now, what are Moses and Elijah doing there? They are there to point us to Jesus. And more point us to Jesus’ “exodus,” his death for the life of the world.

Leading up to our text, Paul has been comparing the old covenant with the new. He concludes that the old is being brought to an end, for the old covenant cannot save, but leads only to death.

To be sure, what was given in the Old Testament came with glory also, but it was a “reflected” glory. It reflected the glory of what was to come. But back there Paul says, when Moses the only one who would see God’s glory, came down from Mt. Sinai where Moses was with God, the people of Israel, could not even see Moses face to face, Paul says (3:7): “Moses... would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.”

That’s teaching us that the Law cannot save us. It can only show us our sin and our need for something more permanent. Our Law-keeping will never reach the perfection God demands. In fact, in Galatians 3, Paul reminds us that the Law of Moses had merely a teaching function. The Law was a guardian or teacher instructing Israel on how sins would be truly atoned. With each animal that was sacrificed, Israel was being taught that without the shedding of blood, there could be no atonement, there could be no forgiveness of sins. Each year, on the Day of Atonement, when the sins of Israel were transferred to the innocent “scapegoat,” Israel would be learning how God would redeem the world, by transferring our sins to another. With every Passover celebration, Israel would be taught to look to the “Lamb of God,” who would once and for all take away the sins of the world.

That was the old covenant—a glorious truth, but veiled, not fully revealed, and intended to fade away.

### **II. A “veil” prevents many from seeing the glory of the new covenant.**

But the Good News is that today, now, you don’t have to come to church and behold God in all his blessings, with a veil placed upon your face. But you can and are blessed with God’s presence that lasts for eternity.

However and sadly, to this day, many have never seen beyond that old covenant; a veil essentially remains. Only when the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to us—only as he “calls, gathers, enlightens”—is the veil removed. Otherwise, the Scriptures remain a closed book, and we miss seeing the one behind the veil: Christ . . . on every page! And many are still with that veil covering!

Our Gospel, the transfiguration event, follows some other events in which Christ revealed who he is. Mark 8 relates the miraculous feeding of the four thousand and the healing of a blind man. We also hear Jesus’ question to the disciples: “Who do people say that I am?” Some answered: John the Baptist, Elijah (who has shown up again today), or one of the other prophets. In other words, people were equating Jesus with

other old covenant figures. Peter, however, was given to recognize Jesus as the Christ. This leads Jesus to predict his crucifixion and death, for that is truly what it means to be the Christ!

But then you know what happened? Peter was unhappy at that word of Jesus' death. He would prevent it. Even after his absolutely true confession of Jesus, the veil remains! Still more to be learned! And so, Jesus takes Peter, with James and John, up the mountain for a lesson.

Paul, and the Corinthians to whom he writes, have true hope in the Gospel. God had, indeed, chosen them in Christ as he's chosen us—and in time, through his Means of Grace, through the Word, the Scriptures, Holy Communion, forgiveness of sins and our Baptism, he's worked it out in our lives. This makes St. Paul bold to speak of salvation in Christ Jesus, for he wishes to be an instrument by which the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed. The Lord desires the same for us!

And yet, to this day, a veil remains for many. Because of our sinful condition, we came into this world turned from God. St. Paul had previously written to these Corinthians that “the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). In fact, it's this veil that kept many in Israel from receiving Jesus. St. John reminds us in his Gospel that “he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:11–13).

### **III. By the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, the veil is lifted in Christ.**

All because of what Peter would have prevented. Christ did travel on to Jerusalem for the purpose of being “glorified”—glorified by being lifted up on the cross. And as Christ was lifted up, the old covenant was being fulfilled, and the veil was being lifted. And upon his dying breath he said “It is finished,” with that the “veil” is not only being lifted, but it is also being torn in two from top to bottom (Mk 15:38)!

Some, then, are converted, are brought to repentance—always solely by the grace of God. The veil is taken away. We can then see Jesus for who he truly is—our Savior from sin, death, and the power of the Law. In fact, we, by God's grace, with “unveiled faces,” also begin to reflect the glory of Christ as the Gospel has its way with us. The Law could never produce such a change, because we cannot keep it perfectly. The Gospel can, because it's all about Christ and what he accomplishes for us on the cross! Yet some would prefer to oppose the Gospel, and even deny it, and even dismiss it as superstition or an “Old wives tale” the problem with that is that they want to retain that veil therefore do not see God, do not see Jesus, and certainly cannot see God's glory through Jesus Cross, his death and his resurrection.

But when is allowed to do His work His glory is revealed just as it was with Peter, John and the other disciple with them on that mountain of Transfiguration. And for those who don't have the veil anymore, God continues his transforming (transfiguring) work in us as we continue to hear the Gospel and as we make frequent use of the Sacraments—his Means of Grace, and delight in His work as we too join in the work of His kingdom. It is never complete in our lifetime, but only brought to completion at our “exodus,” that is as we depart this “then” to swallowed up by true life.

This is why St. Paul can carry out his apostolic ministry and not lose heart—because it isn't about Paul, it isn't about Moses or Elijah, and it isn't about us and never has been! It's only about Jesus! Paul is free, as are we! Free to use the opportunities God gives to confess Christ, knowing that the results are up to God alone.

St. Paul doesn't have to resort to "disgraceful, underhanded ways" (4:2). He doesn't have to use the Law as a way to get what he wants, he doesn't have to resort to deception, and he doesn't have to sugarcoat the Word of God to make it more palatable. There were certainly those in St. Paul's day who were doing so, just as there are in ours.

We simply confess Christ when and where God gives opportunity. If the message is received in grateful hearts, to God be the glory! If it's rejected, and at times it will be, it's only because "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (4:4). We don't lose heart, because the result isn't our responsibility. That always rests solely with God.

We baptized believers, those for whom the Holy Spirit has lifted the veil, can be bold confessors of the new covenant, Christ—"the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9)

In His name, amen!