

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany (A) [*Quinquagesima*]

Exodus 24.12-18

Psalm 99

2 Peter 1.16-21

Matthew 17.1-9

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany brings us the fullest and most revelatory epiphany of them all: Jesus is transfigured so that His disciples see His glory. The lessons focus on the dual truths of the Christian redeemer and of life in Christ.

Exodus 24.12-18

1. This lesson is taken from a section in Exodus in which the covenant between the LORD and Israel is ratified. Just prior to this selection, the people have heard the Ten Commandments and have sworn to obey them.
2. Moses is summoned to the mountain before the LORD, with the elders Aaron and Hur being left in charge of the people.
3. Moses experiences God as an enveloping cloud, a “glory” like a consuming fire.
 - a. Moses enters the cloud, indicating that he is in the immediate presence of the LORD for instruction.

Psalm 99

1. This is the last of the so-called “enthronement hymns,” which extol the glory of the LORD.
2. Vv. 1-5 call for all peoples (all nations) to worship the LORD; another example of the God of Israel being proclaimed as the God of all creation.
 - a. However, the LORD’s special relationship with Israel follows, at vv. 6-7.
 - b. Finally, in vv. 8-9, appeal is made to the mercy and justice of God.
3. God’s mercy and justice reflects His glory.
 - a. God executes His justice and righteousness (v. 4) in that He answers His people (vv. 6, 8), giving them just laws (v. 7), and forgiving or punishing them as necessary (v. 8).

2 Peter 1.16-21

1. Scholars generally agree that 2 Peter was probably not written by the disciple, but by a disciple of him. Nonetheless, the letter represents testimony from an authentic and consistent tradition.
 - a. The letter is one of the “catholic” epistles, in that it is not written to a specific church or person, but addressed to all churches.
2. The author attacks “cleverly devised myths”. These would have been the stories used to explain Gnostic belief in a “demiurge” (a lesser god responsible for the material world). For example, one myth had the divine power coming into the human sphere in the person of Helen of Troy.

- a. In contrast, the author relies on eyewitness testimony of the Transfiguration of Jesus.
3. The letter's account of the Transfiguration parallels very closely those found in the Synoptic Gospels.
4. Mark is agreed to be the oldest Gospel, and one thought to be based on the testimony of Peter. The parallels between the Gospels and this letter probably reflect a common tradition.
5. Peter is generally credited with special revelations (Matt. 16.17), special visions (Matt. 28.16-20), special prophecies (Mark 13.1-3; 14.27-31), and special presence at Jesus' exercise of power (Mark 5.37-43). Thus, he is an especially informed, trustworthy source of testimony about Jesus.
6. The letter sees the Transfiguration as a prophecy of Jesus' Second Coming, of Judgment Day. We are to pay close attention, therefore, for this Transfiguration includes God the Father instructing us who is to judge us!
7. No prophecy is a matter of individual interpretation.
 - a. Prophecy is not designed to make us comfortable.
 - b. The day may dawn, and the "morning star rise" in our hearts, but this is a reference to the Second Coming, and we must be prepared for judgment!

Matthew 17.1-9

1. This account of the Transfiguration begins with the description that it happens "six days" later. This is intended as a direct parallel to Exodus 24.13-16, that the LORD reveals Himself to Moses after six days.
2. Jesus becomes a being of light; His nature becomes luminous, transparent to the disciples' gaze.
 - a. In other words, His true visage is revealed in part.
 - i. The disciples see "face to face" rather than "through a glass, darkly".
 - ii. The cloud of God's glory (*shekinah*) is as that which enveloped Moses.
3. Moses and Elijah are speaking with Jesus. In other words, the Law and the Prophets testify to Him.
4. Unlike in Mark, the disciples here fall in fear not at God's glory, but at what He says.
 - a. Jesus touches them to remove this fear. This may represent that they are consecrated to further service, closer to the Lord.