

authoritative power in the Church. Through the gift of infallibility, he assured us that whatever we were commanded to believe (faith) and do (morals) would always be what he and his heavenly Father wanted us to believe and do (see *The Sunday Readings*, by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan, OFM).

After Jesus finished speaking to Peter, "he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ." Jesus imposed silence on the Apostles because of the people's misconception about his role as Messiah. They would want to make him king and overthrow the Roman government that was ruling them. Jesus would also be hindered in his spiritual work.

It is for these reasons that Jesus, from that time on, began to teach the Apostles about his role as suffering servant: St. Matthew tells us, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Mt 16:21).

AUGUST 6 – THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Gospel: Luke 9:28b-36

"Jesus took Peter, John, and James ..."

Jesus formed a community of support for himself by calling the twelve Apostles. Among these, he had three special friends in Peter, John, and James. We, too, need to make friends and associate closely with others who seek God. They help us to be faithful to God and to keep on growing spiritually. They incite us to intensify our love for God and to seek him more ardently. That is what *Come, Lord Jesus!* groups are all about.

Jesus and his special friends "went up the mountain to pray". The mountain was one of the places Jesus frequented to pray. The mountain provided an atmosphere that was conducive to prayer. The height of the mountain took him away from earthly distractions and brought him into the heavenly places to be with his Father again, away from the noises that interfere with heavenly communications.

We, too, need to go apart and spend some time in prayer alone with God. We must create for ourselves an atmosphere conducive to prayer. We need silence and solitude to be able to communicate with God in the depths of our heart. We need divine intimacy for personal spiritual enrichment. That is why I am so fond of living in my little cottage in the middle of a cane field in Prairie Ronde. It vies with Jesus' place of prayer on the mountain.

"While he was praying, his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white." Here we see the marvelous transforming effects of prayer. Prayer is not just speaking to God or an exchange of words between God and us. Prayer is engaging in an interpersonal communion with God. We enter into God through faith, hope, and love. We open our hearts to receive God and his outpoured love. In this marvelous exchange, the indwelling presence of God, through our openheartedness, is allowed to pervade our whole being as purifying light, to illumine, cleanse, and sanctify us. That is what happened to Jesus. "His face changed in appearance." St. Matthew tells us that Jesus "was transfigured ... his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light" (Mt 17:2).

Grace affects our aura, that energy field that emanates from our persons. "God is light" (1 Jn 1:5). Immersion in God through prayer causes us to assimilate divine qualities such as light, heavenly glory. Purity of heart enables God to shine through us; we begin to radiate the glory of his divine presence. Didn't Jesus say that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:43)?

The opposite is true for those who separate themselves from God through serious sin. Such a separation from God throws them into pitch darkness (see *The Interior Castle of St. Teresa*, First Mansions, Chap II). Sin affects their whole persons. Their aura casts a shadow of darkness around them. It affects their behavior and the people who are around them. They contaminate others with their pessimism and their negative

attitude and behavior. St. Jude in his epistle tells us to “abhor even their flesh stained clothing” (Jd 23).

On the other hand, the divine radiation shining through a person who is closely united to God through purity of heart, affects his immediate atmosphere with healing light. For example, we read in the Acts of the Apostles, “when handkerchiefs or clothes which had touched [St. Paul’s] skin were applied to the sick, their diseases were cured and evil spirits departed from them” (Acts 19:12).

Getting back to our Gospel text, “and behold, two men were conversing with him (Jesus), Moses, and Elijah who appeared in glory and spoke of his Exodus.” You may wonder why Jesus would be speaking to these particular Old Testament men. Moses represents the Law, since the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament religious laws or precepts were given through him. Elijah represents the prophets as chief among them. Moses was founder of the Old Covenant and Elijah was its intrepid defender.

These men of the Old Testament appeared with Jesus in glory. Although their bodies had died many years before (Moses lived about 1250 B.C.; Elijah lived about 860 B.C.), these men appeared in heavenly glory on the mountain and were talking to Jesus. They are witnesses to heavenly life, life after death. This happened about 29 A.D.

Remember the four qualities of resurrected bodies mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44? Our bodies will become incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual, qualities we look forward to receive. Jesus is getting a foretaste of his resurrection. His whole being is penetrated with God’s glory. The divine presence fills him with radiant light.

Jesus had already warned the Apostles (Lk 9:22) about his forthcoming passion, death, and resurrection. In other words, the Messiah is going to accomplish his mission and win our salvation as suffering servant (see Is 42, 49, 50, 52, 53). Jesus is preparing his Apostles for the worst,

his passion and death, by his transfiguration in glory. He wanted to convince them of the necessity of his sufferings as well as to understand his future glory.

St. Luke is the only evangelist who tells us what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about: his “Exodus”, that is, his departure from this earth through his suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection.

The Scripture says, “They saw his glory ... Peter said ... ‘Master, it is good that we are here.’” The experience was so heavenly Peter wanted to build three tents and stay there.

A “cloud”, which is a sign of God’s enveloping presence, overshadowed them. “They became frightened when they entered the cloud.”

God’s overshadowing presence frightened them. Someone, God himself, something, God’s radiating presence, produced an overwhelming experience of such greatness as they had never experienced before. They were afraid.

“Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my chosen Son; listen to him.’”

God the Father himself is so delighted in Jesus he openly announces and identifies him as his own dear Son; they must listen to him. The others, Moses and Elijah disappear. Only Jesus remains. He is the one to whom human beings must now listen. The others, Moses and Elijah, prepared people for Jesus’ coming to earth. They have completed their task. They departed from the scene. Now we must focus our whole attention on God’s beloved Son. We must become totally receptive to him and his words. He speaks with divine wisdom. He reveals the divine mind. He tells us what we must do to live as children of God. He speaks the truth by which we must live. We must take his words into our hearts and ponder them at length, cherish them, and keep them on our minds so we can live by them every moment of our lives.

Jesus is the Promised Land, the kingdom of God

promised Abraham in the first reading. We will inherit the kingdom by being transformed into his likeness. "The Lord Jesus ... will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body" (2nd Reading).

AUGUST 14 – VIGIL OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Gospel: Lk 11:27-28

At the end of her earthly life, Mary was taken up body and soul into heaven. Let us look at the readings today and see how the Scriptures support our belief.

St. Luke's Gospel on the feast of the Assumption sees Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant, you will remember, is the golden box containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant.

In the New Covenant, it is Mary, who bears Jesus, the Word of God, in her womb, who is the Ark of God. In Jesus she contains the New Covenant. She is truly the Ark of the New Covenant.

Today, we celebrate that this ark was taken to heaven body and soul. So we gather around it with music and song to celebrate the occasion just as when David and the people gathered together to honor the ark when it was brought into the place the king had prepared for it. "He and all the Israelites were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the sound of the horn" (2 Sm 6:15). The first reading tells us, "David commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kinsmen as chanters, to play on musical instruments, harps, lyres, and cymbals, to make a loud sound of rejoicing."

"They brought in the ark of God and set it within the tent which David had pitched for it. Then they offered up holocausts and peace offerings to God."

You can see why the Church places this particular reading for our reflection. We celebrate Mary in joy and song as she, the Ark of the New Covenant, is brought to the place which Jesus prepared for

her. She is taken up to heaven body and soul in the mystery of the Assumption. We use the Old Testament setting of David and the people of God welcoming the ark to the place the king had prepared for it. We welcome Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant in the context of the liturgical service. We offer Jesus as our sacrifice of thanksgiving just as David offered sacrifices in thanksgiving for the Ark of the Old Covenant. As Mary is received with honor in heaven in the mystery of the Assumption, we too share in that heavenly celebration.

In the Gospel tomorrow, you will see that Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, said to her, "And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk 1:43) Elizabeth experienced a sense of unworthiness in the presence of Mary, Mother of the Messiah, and bearer of the new Law.

When the sacred writer of the Gospel, St. Luke, wrote this, he was thinking of the very same thoughts that David expressed concerning the ark: David did not feel worthy of receiving the ark into his house; he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sm 6:9).

Another reference to the Ark of the Covenant in St. Luke's Gospel can be seen in Elizabeth's words when she says, "The moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1:44). These words remind us of "David leaping and dancing" (1 Chron 15:29) before the ark "as he and all the Israelites were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts of joy ..." (2 Sm 6:15).

St. Luke's final reference to Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant can be seen in the last verse of the Gospel for the feast of the Assumption. He tells us, "Mary remained with her [Elizabeth] about three months and then returned to her house" (Lk 1:56). This verse runs in close parallel with a statement about the ark: "The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obededom the Gittite for three months, and the Lord blessed Obededom and his whole house" (2 Sm 6:11). For the third time then we are given evidence that