

✠ LUKE 9:28-36 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

St. Luke tells us that Jesus took Peter, John, and James up that mountain and prayed. What do you think Jesus prayed for? Healing? Riches? World peace? To be liked by His neighbors? For church growth? No. He prayed that His Father would be glorified and that He would fulfill the purpose for which He was sent.

And here stand Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus. But make no mistake, it is not a conversation among equals: three great men of God discussing the things of God.

Indeed, Moses was a great man. He brought the plagues of Egypt down upon the head of Pharaoh and his house. He parted the Red Sea so that Israel crossed on dry ground; and when Pharaoh and his men tried to cross, Moses closed the waters upon him, so that he and his horsemen were drowned in the sea. Moses promised manna from heaven, water from rocks, salvation from the viper's venom. He built the Tabernacle of the Lord where the Name of God dwelt among the people of God. Moses beheld God face to face as one friend to another. Moses brought the people the Law of God, issuing verdicts and judgment as if he were God, so says Scripture. Moses went up Mt. Sinai, into the cloud of God and lived to write about it.

So, too, was Elijah a great man. He raised the dead and made flour and oil multiply never-endingly. He closed the heavens so that it did not rain for three years. He ran faster than chariots and slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal in one afternoon. He called down fire from heaven, consuming an altar of stone that had been soaked in gallons and gallons of water. He challenged the most powerful queen in the known world and won. He did not even taste death but was taken to God by the chariots of Israel.

But Moses and Elijah did not appear before Jesus and Jesus did not change His countenance for them. Do you think that the One who could cast out demons with His word, heal the sick and infirm with His touch, and raise the dead was not able to always see the cloud of witnesses that surrounded Him?

Jesus allowed Peter, John, and James to behold what was always before them: God in the flesh, the Messiah, the Promised Seed of Abraham, and those who bear witness to Him: the Law and the Prophets. Do not think that the veil of humanity was stripped from Jesus to reveal His glory, or that Moses and Elijah showed up to strengthen and assure the Son of God. The veil of blindness and of unbelief was stripped from the eyes of the disciples so that they could see what was always there. Moses and Elijah were made visible to the disciples to strengthen their faith for what was to come in Jerusalem.

When Moses descended Mt. Sinai with the Law of God, his face reflected the glory of God by shining brightly. But here, this man's face, Jesus' face, did not reflect the glory of anyone but shone brightly with His own glory. This Jesus is the self-same God who spoke to Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai; He is the self-same God who sent Elijah to care for the widows, raise the dead, and shut the heavens. Jesus' countenance changed and His clothes became dazzling white so that Moses and Elijah would recognize who it was that was going to fulfill the Law and

the Prophets: this Jesus of Nazareth. Thus they spoke with Him about His death that He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

“Lord,” Moses might have said, “when the people of Israel walked through the dry ground of the Red Sea, it foreshadowed your death in Jerusalem, didn’t it?” Yes. “Lord,” Elijah might have said, “when I closed the heavens for three years and it did not rain, it was to signify your death and burial for three days, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” our Lord says, “all of what you wrote and did points to me? I am the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. I am the Lamb in the thicket for Abraham; I am the portion of Israel; I am the King of Judah; I am the Priest greater than you, Moses; I am the Prophet mightier than you, Elijah. My words will not pass away, my death will not be the end; my kingdom shall reign on for eternity as I promised to David, my servant.”

Here Peter succumbs to the temptation to which we all succumb: to have a Jesus without His cross. “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” Peter loved his Teacher, and wanted Him to be taken care of and venerated, and his heart was in the right place, but his thoughts are not the thoughts of God and his ways are not the ways of God. “Lord,” we often say, “it is good for us to be here, in this house of worship, but do we have to think on your death? Do we have to make the focus of our worship your bloody crucifixion? Why can’t we remain here in the realm of love and being kind to our neighbors? Why can’t we hear more about how you love us and hold us and keep us from harm? Lord,” we say, “it is good for us to be here where you are not hanging upon the tree.” But we, like Peter, are not listening.

But God in His great mercy did not allow Peter to dwell long on the prospect of pitching tent and remaining on top the mountain. Not only did God allow Peter, John, and James to see the cloud of witnesses that surrounded Jesus; not only did God allow them to behold the glory of the Son of God as He is; but God also allowed them to hear the uncovered voice of God. At Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan the Father spoke to Jesus: “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” But now the Father did not speak for Jesus’ sake. God the Father speaks to His disciples: “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him!”

Yet even with this fantastic display of divinity and power, Peter would go on to deny our Lord. He would try and keep Jesus from the cross; he would deny knowing Him in the courtyard of the high priest’s house; he would later deny Jesus when, having been told in a dream that the Gentiles were also included in the Church, he treated them as outsiders, and had to be rebuked by Paul. Finally, after being refined like gold and purified like silver, Peter would be martyred by being crucified upside down. In the end he would die for his belief that Jesus is the Son of God, was crucified and buried, but rose again on the third day, for the forgiveness of his sins.

Finally, in the end, Peter did listen to Jesus.

“Hear, O Israel, I am your King, and I reign upon my throne fashioned by the hands of executioners. I am not meant to stay upon this lofty mountain, dwelling in booths made by mortal hands; a sort of novelty to be doted upon and revered from afar. I have come in the flesh to do what no one else can. I have come to undue the damage caused by Adam; not only so, but I have come to re-create you in my image, for I am God. Do not assume that you can contain me and so keep me from my purpose. I will not turn to the left nor to the right; I will press on to Calvary where I will hang my body upon the cursed tree; giving my flesh and

spilling my blood for you, for your forgiveness.

“Though you do not understand, though you seek to keep me from death, I must rebuke your ways for they are not my ways; I must condemn your thoughts for they are not my thoughts. Before you were born, before you were conceived in your mother’s womb I was destined to die for your sins.

“It is not good for you to stay here where I have not tasted death for you. It is not good for you to stay here where you would fashion me in your image. You must come with me. You must take up your cross and follow me to mine. You mustn’t reason that there must be some other way, some way less brutal, less bloody, less offensive; for anything less is not of God for God demands the blood of a righteous sacrifice without blemish.

“It is not good for you to stay here with Moses and Elijah, for they were merely forerunners, heralds of things to come. No, you must be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with; you must die in me so that you may live in me. You must lose your life so that I can give you eternal life.

“Leave your sins behind you, repent, and turn to me, your Lord and your God. By my death and resurrection I have accomplished salvation for you; I have paid the price for your redemption. Listen to my words, O Israel, heed my rebuke, O Jacob. Do not think to yourselves that you have Moses and Elijah, or that you have love and charity, for I am the only way to salvation. Do not look to the left nor to the right, but keep your eyes on me, the author and perfecter of your faith.”

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠