

THE TRANSFIGURATION

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From *The Feasts of Mother Church*

by Mother Mary Salome

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It may be hoped that in the busiest life there comes a time when "Stop work" is called. For holidays are good for soul and body. They are changes of position, as it were, which make change of thought easier. We get so engrossed by close attention that we lose the relative proportion of things. Then a break comes and we leave off our teaching, our buying and selling, typing or organising, and immediately the view changes. We have time to see others, their work, and their interests, and some of the selfishness comes out of us.

In the days of long ago, when our Lord was upon earth, there were holidays too. He gave them to His disciples. They led busy, active lives, and they had not time "so much as to eat bread" they tell us. When sent on a mission, they preached and healed and cast out devils; when they were with our Lord they received the multitudes, looked after the sick, introduced strangers, pacified the impatient, and encouraged the timid. But there were days when our Lord said: "Come apart and rest awhile;" and these were red-letter days. Sometimes all of the Apostles were included in the invitation. Sometimes it was only given to the chosen three. This was the case at the Transfiguration. Peter and James and John were the privileged ones, but we may join their company without intruding.

Jesus leads the way up into a high mountain. He is going to pray, and the Apostles are going to rest themselves in sleep. An evening will come when the word will be "Watch one hour." Tonight they are to sleep in His blessed company. Tradition says that Jesus used to cover up the tired men with their outer cloaks, and then withdraw a few paces to pray by Himself. It is not hard to believe such traditions; they accord so well with what we know of His Sacred Heart.

Night draws on; the three Apostles sleep heavily, St. Luke tells us. But it was not merely for natural refreshment that our Lord had brought them "apart by themselves"; they were to see and hear things that it was not given to all men to see and hear. "And awaking, they saw His glory." Darkness enveloped the mountain, but before them stood their Master surrounded with a brilliant light. He was transfigured. "His face did shine as the sun and His garments became shining and exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller upon earth can make white. And behold two men were talking with Him. And they were Moses and Elias, appearing with majesty, and they spoke of His decease that He should accomplish in Jerusalem."

"They spoke of His decease," yet none of His Apostles understood the word. It was as if our Lord were offering to His beloved three a twofold grace, and that they were ready to receive but one, and that the lesser. Here were heavenly delight and refreshment —the sight of their Master in His glory. And there was the prophecy of His coming passion and death. Did He want them to participate in His pain? It seemed like it. But they did not respond to His longing; the joy was enough for them. With such brilliant beauty before their eyes, how could they think of ignominy and shame? "Far be it from Thee" was still the attitude of their minds. "Master, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias," Peter cried out. "As he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them; and lo! a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." The three fell prostrate upon their faces and were very much afraid. How long they remained in awful meditation we do not know; but it was the hand of their Master that brought them back to earth. He came and touched them and said, "Arise, and fear not!" And they, lifting up their eyes, saw no one, but only Jesus.

And as they came down from the mountain, He charged them not to tell any man what they had seen till the Son of Man should be risen from the dead. "When He should be risen from the dead!" What did that mean? they questioned together. "Had He not looked as if He could never die, as if He were already glorified? Then what did death mean?" There were many things those dear Apostles had to learn. Jesus would wait and keep in His own Heart the fearful secret of His suffering. It sufficed for the present that they should be comforted by a glorious sight. In the day of their trial they would remember the glistening robe, the transfigured face, and if the remembrance could not save them from doubt and flight and denial, it would at least help them back to belief and love.

It is well for us also to look at the shining face of our dear Master, to see His glistening white robes, and rejoice in His divine Majesty, His by right, even though veiled, upon earth. It is well, too, to think that for us also there is laid by a glistening robe, white as no fuller upon earth can make white, if only we will strive to win it. What a joy it will be to that Master to invest us with glory, to transfigure us in Heaven, as for our comfort and joy He showed Himself transfigured upon earth!