

A Sermon for the Transfiguration, August 6, 2026
The Epistle, 2 Peter 1:13-18 - The Gospel, St. Luke 9:28-36
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The Transfiguration and the Exodus

The Transfiguration of Christ calls to mind the experience of Moses when he received the Ten Commandments. Exodus 34:29 says, “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai . . . [he] did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with [God].” In the Transfiguration, Jesus also ascended a mountain and “The appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening” (Lk. 9:29).

St. Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about his “decease.” The word “decease” is the English translation of the Greek word “exodus.” The use of the word “exodus” means that St. Luke is proclaiming Jesus’ death as the fulfillment of the Old Testament exodus story. Jesus will lead a new exodus through the cross into new, resurrection life.

The only other New Testament passage where the Greek word exodus is used is in the epistle for the Transfiguration. St. Peter writes,

I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my *decease* (which, again, is an English translation of the Greek word exodus, 2 Pet. 1:13-15).

St. Peter uses the same word to refer to his own death that St. Luke used to refer to the death of Christ. This teaches us that those who die “in Christ” participate in the deliverance Jesus accomplished on the cross. In Christ, we also pass through death into life.

St. Paul discusses this same theme in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. He writes:

We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this [tent] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

Both St. Paul and St. Peter refer to our mortal body as a tent, a temporary dwelling place. We must leave this tent by death, but we will be clothed, or re-embodied, with a resurrection body like the body of the Risen Christ. This is the habitation from heaven. This is not a disembodied spiritual state. St. Paul says that we do not want to be “unclothed” or “naked” but “further clothed.” As we say in the Creed, “We look for the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.”

The Transfiguration and Prayer

In the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus to confirm that his death will fulfill the law and prophets. But the Transfiguration is not merely a teaching moment. Jesus experienced a taste of the future glory that will be his on the other side of the cross—and that was his from the beginning with the Father. It was experiential encouragement.

To be sure, Jesus will offer himself for the sins of the world because the law and the prophets say that he must; but the Transfiguration is taste and vision of the future glory and joy to help him on his way. Hebrews says that Jesus, “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2).

We are called to follow Jesus in the way of the cross that leads to the resurrection. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). However, we will not be able to sustain faithfulness through trial just because we know we should. We will not persevere only because we are afraid of the consequences of disobedience, or because we want to look good. In the long run, we will do what Jesus calls us to do because we experience something of our future glory in our prayer—something that we want more than anything in this world.

Job illustrates this point. Job’s friends came to “comfort” him by explaining his sufferings to him—trying to guilt him into some kind of repentance. But Job’s questions were not answered until God appeared to him, and Job saw God’s glory. That was enough for Job, even though God did not answer his questions. As Job said, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).

In the Eucharist we “lift up our hearts” and ascend to the Father through Jesus in the Spirit. Some measure of the glory of God is revealed to each person whose eyes are open to see. Then, having been transfigured by our vision of God we return to the world to fulfill our vocation, to do the good works God has prepared for us. Our taste of glory and joy sustains us. Our faithfulness over time will be directly proportional to our vision of God.

The Christian life involves a repeated pattern of ascent with Jesus followed by a return to life and vocation in the world. Alexander Schmemmann connects the two in this way. He writes,

We must not stay on Mount Tabor, although we know that it is good for us to be here. We are sent back. But now we have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit. And it is as witnesses of this Light, as witnesses of the Spirit, that we must ‘go forth’ . . . This is the meaning of the Eucharist; this is why the mission of the church begins in the liturgy of ascension, for it alone makes possible the liturgy of mission.

In the words of the Transfiguration collect, we must be “Delivered from the disquietude of the world” and “permitted to behold the king in his beauty” before we can reflect God’s glory to the world and obey Christ with the purer motive of love. We will continue in this pattern of ascent with Christ followed by return to the world to fulfill our vocation until it is our time to put off our tent and experience our own exodus.