

Pr. Dr. Dimitra Koukoura
Ecumenical Patriarchate

Kuala Lumpur 06/08/2004
Feast of the Transfiguration

Biblical reflection (Mt 17.1-13) Life transfigured

“...and he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white” (Mt 17.2)

Peter, John and James became eye witnesses of the glory of Christ and ear witnesses that he is indeed the Beloved Son of God whom they have to listen to.

Peter in his second Epistle (1.10-19) repeats his doubtfulness experience of the majesty of God on the Mount and confirms the faithful people ever since that the teaching of the Gospel is not devised myths.

This happened some time before the Passion in order to help the disciples understand that the extreme humiliation and the horrible suffering on the Cross occurred voluntary, by the free will and choice of the Incarnated Lord for the salvation of the corrupted human nature.

On the other hand Jesus' Transfiguration announces his glorious Resurrection from the deaths, when the light of his divine nature welled out his empty tomb and shone again before the eyes of the Myrrh bearers women on the habit of the angel.

This sight of the light that seals the divinity of Christ was not the unique privilege of the male and female disciples of the Master. It is revealed to each one that believes in God and opens freely his/her eyes, heart and mind to receive his ceaseless donation.

It is the grace of God that shines upon the face of every human being created in his likeness and image and assures the presuppositions for everyone to know the truth. It is through the light of God that we see his face of love, compassion, forgiveness and eternal life.

The believers are called to become the good receivers of this gift. If they freely offer their existence to become the recipient of the grace of God, then they are truly transfigured into literally gracious ones. In the community where they leave through their behavior they give the witness of “another type” of man a woman. Through their choices, their understanding, their tolerance, their creative collaboration and their charity they indicate to the world the light of the truth they experience

Our orthodox tradition insists vigorously on the light of the divinity that the believers are gifted to experience as his sanctifying power. It is the radiation of

the uncreated triune God which is also uncreated. God is timeless and spaceless, without any beginning and without any end. No created nature can ever conceive, understand or participate in the inaccessible essence of God.

However in the Gospel our God is revealed as Love. This is the only affirmation we can conceive about his indeterminate essence which is experienced through its manifestations: that is the creation its self, the Divine Economy, - the healing plan of the fallen humanity- and the human participation by grace to the eternal life.

The holy grace redeems the fallen humanity by the Baptism; sanctifies the Holy Gifts on the altar; purifies the human conscience and lights the mind of those who receive the Holy blood and the holy Body of Christ; keeps their faith solid and makes them worthy participants in his eternal risen Presence.

One can easily understand the stress put by the orthodox tradition on the light of the Transfiguration, if he or she only enters into an orthodox sacred temple. He or she can see on the wooden icons or on the walls male alongside with female figures having a halo around their head. This is the perceptible indication of the divine light they voluntarily received in their life which transfigured their mind and their will and led them to respond to the needs of the lessen brothers sisters of Christ.

These are the holy people of God who share the various gifts they receive from God with those they are in need of. By this choice they give a real proof that they are created in the image and likeness of God.

God is love. This is the essence of our God that is revealed to us as One and Unique God, one Deity in three distinct Persons (*Hypostaseis*). The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are united into One by the bound of love which they perpetually share with each other (*perichoresis*). It is by this love that the creation was made in order to be also shared with the images of God

Following the Trinitarian sharing of love we are also called to offer our adoration to the triune God and our love to the people of God. Our adoration as a sign of thanksgiving for his gift of life and healing from the corruption and our love as a proof that we are truly children of God worthy for his grace. It is self evident that nobody should be excepted from our love, no matter his/her race, origin, cultural or religious background.

It takes two necessary factors for the transfiguration of each human being and consequently the transfiguration of the life of the community he or she belongs.

The one is given. It is the holy grace of God that redeems the mistrustfulness; it is his uncreated light that shows the way to the truth; it his sanctifying power that heals the wounds of the prodigal humanity.

The second factor depends on the free human cooperation (*synergeia*) with the grace of Lord which is given gratis to each human being without any exceptions. In the life of the holy people of God we realize that this collaboration is a real fact. With their presence in the human history they act like the small proportion of the yeast that leavened the whole quantity of the flavor(Mt 13,33). They are usually the outsiders of the society, the marginal who offer their own time, their money, their conveniences, their special gifts for the relief of the suffering people. Or even they raise their voice against the injustice at the risk of their safety and integrity. Especially they are all those who constantly and firmly pray to God crying and insisting like the small children asking him to show the way out of the various impasses people face in their everyday life. They are those who forgive and love even their enemies.

However who can deny the cruel reality we everyday experience? After the miasma in Hiroshima how many similar to that followed? Bombings, eliminations of cultural heritage, explosions of nuclear and chemical industries, global warming, spreading of the human exploitation and the social injustice, totalitarian imposition of the mass media?

The question from the depths of the human soul always sounds the same: until when, my Lord, your creatures will prefer the dark for the light, the pain for the joy, the exploitation for the respect, the death for the life?

The answers are not easy to be found. Our Lord even after his triumphant victory over the death remains crucified bearing all the pain and the sorrow of his persecuted, exploited and abused brothers and sisters.

However he is the definite triumphant victor over the death.

In our orthodox tradition the spiritual experience of the Cross and the Resurrection creates the ethos of "*Charmolype*" (joy and sorrow). The sorrow is connected to the human sin and the works of human unfaithfulness. It leads to the constant pray and to the responsible action for the relief of the suffering victims. The joy wells up from the tomb of risen Christ that donated the eternal life to all the created and mortal humanity. The light of the resurrection transfigures the life of the believers and gives them the courage to hope, to fight, to insist, to sing joyful hymns of the common resurrection even during their funeral services.

Counting the results of the pride, the arrogance, the cruelty and the hypocrisy of the powerful minority that manipulates the lives of the people in the world, one can remember the question of the Myrrh bearer women "who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

The answer is not different. The stone is already been rolled back. Now on is the task of women and men who experience the fact of the resurrection to proclaim this truth to the people. To revangelize those who have forgotten their roots, to strengthen in faith those who are unable, to bring the hope to those who look for it.

Lord transfigured before the eyes of his disciples a little before his Cross in order to assure them that he is truly the Son of God. After two millennia, we Christians experience the Light of the Glory of God being sure that he is truly the Son of God the Victor of Death!

Let me end this orthodox reflection on the feast day of Transfiguration with a special liturgical hymn we sing during the holy liturgy of this day:

*"Oh Christ our God, at the time of your Transfiguration on the Mount
You showed your disciples as much of your glory as they could hold.
Through the prayers of your Mother of God let your eternal light shine also
Upon us sinners, oh Giver of Light glory to you".*

