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- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

Many years ago, I was serving a couple, who were getting on in years. Along with the typical challenges of the body weakening, they were both diagnosed with serious illnesses, that would later claim their earthly lives. Both were very faithful and bluntly honest. They were honest about not liking their predicament, but they were confident in God's presence with them. They were sick but surrounded by family who loved and cared for them. They spent their last days remembering the good times and the hard ones. They prayed together daily. As I was anointing the husband, the wife looked at me and said, "It's a good thing God doesn't show us the future, because if He did, no one could stand it." In a way, no truer words have ever been spoken. While many wish to see the future, God in His generosity holds it back because we would lack the faith to absorb it, could easily misinterpret it, and possibly be gripped in fear because of it.

Today's image of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor is an exception to the rule of the future being shown to us. Jesus deliberately gives Peter, James and John an image of the future when showing them His glorified body along with Moses and Elijah. It's amazing, really. The three apostles, immediately after being warned about carrying the Cross and Jesus' eventual suffering and death, are shown Jesus in His glorified state. The image is so unbelievable that some modern Scripture scholars dismiss its placement in the Bible as something of a "lookback," where a post-resurrection experience is placed in the ministry of Jesus and gives pride of place to the three. I personally find the argument unconvincing and really an attempt to explain away in human earthly terms a divine action.

There is a reason that the Transfiguration shows up in Lent. While we face the desert and our weak nature, Jesus gives us a life to look forward to. The glorified existence of Heaven and the clear link between the Old Covenant and the New are gifts to be embraced, as we live with the Cross and suffering. I think there is a reason that Jesus *showed* them the Transfiguration, but only *told* them of the Cross. It goes back to knowing the future and not being able to handle it. If we could really see the suffering we will encounter, (and God gives us the grace to endure,) we might be too afraid to live for Him. Seeing the glory allows us to persevere. Seeing the Cross is an unmeasurable temptation to quit and not embrace the future, of which God is always in control.

Practically speaking, knowing the future purports to eliminate the unknown, but it also eliminates the adventure that is walking with God. Living in faith and not by sight also shields us from the Crosses we might not understand until we get there or even after they are gone. Jesus knows what He is doing in showing us the beauty of the glory, while keeping to Himself the specifics of the Cross. We can handle the glory and need it when our vision is clouded.

The Transfiguration is not simply an experience of the Resurrection placed into the pre-paschal ministry of Jesus. It is both a lesson and an experience of who Jesus is and what is to come. Even as we experience daily trials, tribulations and the Cross, we have the glory of God to look forward to and experience. It is an ideal way to live Lent in fasting and look forward to feasting.

The future, our future, is foggy, and our vision of it is shaped by both our past and our present. It is easy to fall into an attitude of believing that it will never change if we think things are bad. It can also lead to a naïveté that ignores the Cross if we think things are great and ought to be the norm. Rather than be trapped by our own misperceptions, Jesus gives us a different way. We are called to walk with Him, realize that He is the Lord of history and Heaven and Earth, and always "has our back." That's the short on the detailed image of the future we hold on to.

It is wise that God rarely shows us the details of the future. It could be both grim and demoralizing, and most of us couldn't stand it. But seeing the glory of heaven gives us something to look forward to beyond our imagination.