

Being Transfigured - Person by Person

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When you called me to serve my brothers and filled my soul with humility, one of your deep-piercing rays shone into my heart; it became luminous, full of light like iron glowing in the furnace. I have seen your face, face of mystery and of unapproachable glory.

(From the Akathist, "*Glory to God for All Things*" by Fr. Gregory Petrov)

Light, glory, revelation, power. These words provide us with many themes for trying to understand the Great Feast of the Transfiguration. "Thou wast transfigured on the Mount, O Christ God, revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far they could bear it." (Troparion) This Feast speaks to us of the moment when Christ allowed his disciples to behold something of his real self, his real glory - at least as much as they could. In doing this he not only showed them who he was, but also revealed to them and to us what we will become. "Today Christ on Mount Tabor has changed the darkened nature of Adam, and filling it with brightness He has made it godlike." (Aposticha for Small Vespers) This revelation has power; it has consequences. "Thou wast transfigured upon Mount Tabor, showing the exchange mortal men will make with Thy glory at Thy second and fearful coming, O Savior." (Matins, sessional hymn) Just as Adam's destiny, his mortality, befell each person from generation to generation, so the transfiguration of human nature made possible by Christ can also be acquired - person by person.

For the last fifty years, August 6, the Feast day of the Transfiguration, has also carried with it a heavy burden: it marks the date when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima (1945). The bomb with all of its brutal destructive power ironically presents us with the manifestation or perversion of some profound spiritual themes. The development of this kind of bomb which may, in fact, bring about the annihilation of all creation was actually developed by those who sought to save the world. Its first full-scale test was even given the code name, "Trinity." Most significant is the understanding that at its basic level the atomic bomb assumes the terrific release of energy given off when the nucleus - the central portion of an atom, the essential building block of life, is split - leading to a chain reaction, which results in the division of other nuclei and the resulting additional release of energy.

What this has to do with the Transfiguration might not be obvious at first. But perhaps it is not too far-fetched to present it this way: The nuclear chain reaction takes place when energy is released from the center of the atom, the foundation of life. This energy may be destructive, as in the case of a bomb, or it may have a peaceful commercial value as power. Within the heart, the spiritual center of each human being, there are also the

capabilities for goodness and evil. Jesus expressed this clearly when he said that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil" (Mt 12:34-35). These capabilities, presented in all their richness within the hymnography of the Transfiguration, can also spread or move as part of a chain reaction. Not only has the "darkened nature of Adam", his original sin - his mortality been transmitted to each person, but there are other "generational" sins or dispositions that are handed on within families and generations of families. The tendency towards physical and sexual abuse and an inclination towards alcoholic or other dependencies, located deep within one's genetic structure, are only a few examples. There are also those who have the ability and power to motivate and energize others for evil purposes, providing them a convincing message that spreads from person to person. The resulting actions of gangs and violence by groups of people who react to these messages occur too frequently in our society.

But just as evil words and deeds can move from person to person, generation to generation, so it is the conviction of Christians that goodness and holy words and actions can also heal and spread. They can, in fact, be part of a transfiguring "chain reaction" begun by God, manifested by Jesus during the Transfiguration and shared by humanity, person to person. "Save yourself and thousands around you will be saved," said St. Seraphim of Sarov. Within the liturgy, we continually offer the prayer of our mutual concern for one another in the petition that we would, "commend ourselves and each other, and all our lives unto Christ our God."

Dostoevsky, writing in *The Brothers Karamazov*, noted the far reaching possibilities of this transforming love, this energy which begins with a prayerful attention for all of creation. He says, in the words of Fr. Zossima, the monastic elder, "My brother asked forgiveness of the birds: it seems senseless, yet it is right, for all is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echoes at the other end of the world." For Fr. Zossima, this prayerful attention is also realized in the confidence of sharing one's "light" with others:

If you had shone, your light would have lighted the way for others, and the one who did wickedness would perhaps not have done so in your light. And even if you do shine, but see that people are not saved even with your light, remain steadfast, and do not doubt the power of the heavenly light; believe that if they are not saved now, they will be saved later. And if they are not saved, their sons will be saved, for your light will not die, even when you are dead. The righteous man departs, but his light remains.

This is the power of the Transfiguration, a transforming power from God to us, and from us to whomever we have contact with. It is not always clear to what extent the transformation takes place in us and how successful our prayers and witness (our light) are in transforming others. But to "not doubt the power of the heavenly light," and to

know that the "light will not die" are important testimonies we can hold within ourselves and manifest in all we do.

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