

## Transfiguration of the Lord – Three Tabernacles

*In the name of the Father...*

*Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles.*

Our Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, momentarily manifesting the hitherto concealed splendor of his divinity to his apostles, follows upon him foretelling of his death.<sup>1</sup> His Transfiguration, then, was to strengthen the apostles for the scandal which was his passion. The collect for today's Mass tells of the Transfiguration strengthening the mysteries of *faith* for us.

Ecstatic at the vision, St Peter said: *Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles.* The collect for today's Mass also tells of the Transfiguration signifying our future perfect adoption as children of God.

Our Lord taught of the spiritual life: *If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*<sup>2</sup> And St Paul wrote: *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*<sup>3</sup> Subjectively, then, our spiritual life is spoken of as God dwelling within us, as in a temple or a tabernacle, and in Peter's ecstatic statement we can recognize a trinitarian dimension. Objectively, our spiritual life is directed toward God, as Our Lord taught: *This is eternal life: that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*<sup>4</sup> Certainly Peter had before him, if only momentarily, the face-to-face vision of the Incarnate Son of God in his glory, a punctual prelude of that eternal life.

In his gratuity, God has called rational creatures – angels and men – to share in his own divine life, the eternal contemplation of himself in perfect knowledge and love. Such is the life of the blessed in heaven, where, endowed with the light of glory, they see God face-to-face. They know directly... *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

For us sojourners still on earth, if in a state of grace, we also truly participate in God's life but in a way which is still in part mediated by creatures. This life of grace is characterized principally by the three theological virtues of *faith*, *hope* and *charity*, virtues which reach beyond the created order and attain God himself, at least some aspect of him, so that God does truly dwell in us and we truly share in the life of the blessed.

The first of those three tabernacles then, by which we attain God, by which God dwells in us, is the virtue of *faith*. *Faith* is not a collection of ideas or opinions about God or spiritual things. When

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<sup>1</sup> [Mt 16:21](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Jn 14:23](#)

<sup>3</sup> [1 Cor 3:16](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Jn 17:3](#)

expressions such as “people of faith”, “different faith traditions” and “interfaith dialogue” are used, most often their referent is such nonsensical and mutually contradictory collections. *Faith*, rather, is a quality of the soul, a virtue, infused by God, essentially supernatural, utterly unattainable by our own efforts, ordering us to a supernatural end.

*Faith* attains God as *Deus verax*, i.e., under the aspect of his veracity, believing what he has revealed on the authority of him who reveals, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

*Faith* does not therefore bestow vision: its object is still mediated by creatures, described by the articles of the Creed, framed in words which have their origin and meaning in creatures. These articles, however, transcend what creatures alone can reveal to us of God, for creatures can reveal neither God’s trinitarian life nor the Incarnation, these being the two major articles of the Creed.

We can note that it is only by *faith* that we are ordered to eternal life. As St Paul writes: *without faith, it is impossible to please God.*<sup>5</sup> Even if we possess a whole multitude of nice ideas about God and spiritual things, without *faith* we are not established on a path which terminates in the Beatific Vision.

The second of those tabernacles is *hope*. To attain beatitude – eternal life – is beyond the natural capability of any intellectual creature actual or conceivable, even in a state of innocence. It is a strictly supernatural work, utterly reliant on God. In the first place, then, the formal object of *hope* – the reason for hoping – is *Deus auxilians*. That is, *hope* attains God under the aspect of his omnipotence and fidelity. Being omnipotent, God can bring intellectual creatures to a participation in his own divine life, and indeed has promised to do so and cannot be unfaithful to his promises. As the psalmist writes: *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.* And St Paul writes of the... *hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.*<sup>6</sup>

With the advent of sin, however, *hope* must also rest on God's *mercy*. St Thomas notes: *Hope [trusts in] God's... mercy whereby even he who has not grace can obtain it so as to come to eternal life.*<sup>7</sup> For *faith* to be genuine, it must accord with its measure – the articles of the Creed. So also *hope* must accord with its measure. To be the object of God’s *mercy* and so to have genuine *hope*, the sinner must be repentant and willing to reform. One cannot cling to gravely sinful situations and hope for God’s mercy.

The third and final tabernacle is *charity*, which is not some vague do-good feeling. Like *faith* and *hope*, it is a virtue infused into the soul by God,<sup>8</sup> proportioning us to attaining eternal life. Unlike

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<sup>5</sup> [Heb 11:6](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Tit 1:2](#)

<sup>7</sup> [ST IIa IIae 18, 4, ad 2um](#)

<sup>8</sup> This ordinarily is effected through the instrumentality of the sacraments, first at Baptism, then in the case of subsequent mortal sin through Confession.

*faith* and *hope*, however, *charity* does not attain to God under some aspect: rather it attains to God in himself. Indeed, *charity* is eternal life, as St John writes: God is *charity*. Thus, unlike *faith* and *hope* which will cease, *charity* will remain in heaven. Indeed, *charity* here on earth unites us directly to heaven even now. It is *charity* which constitutes our adoption as sons.

And like *faith* and *hope*, *charity* has a measure. Our Lord teaches: *If you love me, keep my commandments... he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... if you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love*. Just as one who presumes on God's *mercy* without intention to reform is devoid of *hope*, so also one who violates the commandments in any grave way is devoid of *charity*.

If we are to remain in the presence of the Lord, then we too must build these three tabernacles – *faith*, *hope* and *charity* – or rather, as for King David, have God build them for us.<sup>9</sup>

St Peter desired to remain on Tabor, raptured in the vision of the splendor of the Incarnate Son of God. He misunderstood, however, Our Lord's motive. Mount Tabor was but a waypoint to be passed through on the way to Mount Calvary. Indeed, immediately after telling of his forthcoming crucifixion and immediately prior to his Transfiguration Our Lord taught: *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*.<sup>10</sup> The Transfiguration was a consolation to strengthen the apostles for the Passion. As with Peter, so it is dangerous for us to cling to the consolations by means of which God would draw us on. Our Lord gently chided his disciples, scandalized by his crucifixion: *O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and so enter into his glory?* The Acts of the Apostles records of St Paul... *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*. For the weak, as for the apostles, the theological virtues – *faith*, *hope* and *charity* – require support. But that support, those consolations, must be removed: those virtues must be refined by trial, purged of selfish self-interest if they are to be transfigured and shine forth in all their splendor. It is only then, in anticipation of that perfect adoption, that we shall remain uninterruptedly in the presence of the glorified Lord.

*Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles.*

*In the name of the Father...*

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<sup>9</sup> c.f., [2 Sam 7](#), where King David vows to build a house for the Lord,

<sup>10</sup> [Mt 16:24](#)