

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

6th August

On this feast we celebrate Christ's self-manifestation to his three closest disciples Peter, James and John. Jesus appears as the new Moses meeting God in the cloud on a new Sinai with his face shining. Jesus is accompanied by Moses and Elijah who also received revelations on Sinai and they personify the Law and the Prophets which Jesus came to bring to perfection. The voice from the cloud commands that Jesus should be listened to as the new Moses and when the vision ends 'they saw no one but Jesus' because he is the perfect and definitive teacher. Jesus glory fades because he is the servant who must suffer and die before entering into glory by the resurrection. The first reading is a vision of Daniel who sees God on his throne and 'a son of man' comes before God's throne and on him is conferred kingship. In the second reading we have the words of 'Peter' teaching from his experience on the mountain.

The **First Reading** is from the prophet Daniel. This is one of the prophetic books in the Bible coming after Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and before the twelve minor prophets. The book falls into two main parts, the first, chapters 1-6, is the narratives of Daniel and his companions' trials in which their reputation and even their lives are at stake. Daniel and his companions emerge victorious and their persecutors glorify God for having saved them. The action takes place apparently in Babylon in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his son's successor. The second half of the book relates to visions granted to Daniel. The author is writing (167-164 BC) a long time after the events recorded and has made use of oral and written traditions still current in his own time and he has made the hero of these pious tales a certain Daniel. The aim of the book is to sustain the faith and hope among the Jews during persecution in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BC). Daniel and his companions had suffered similarly although this present persecutor is painted in very dark colours, but he will be destroyed and the kingdom of the Saints, ruled over by the Son of Man, will be realised (ch.7). The revelation in the book concerns the hidden plan of God who controls times and seasons for his people and the nations. The book is not truly part of the prophetic tradition, it has affinities with wisdom literature in the first part and apocalyptic literature in the second part, the Apocalypse is its NT counterpart.

The reading, 7.9-10,13-14, is an account of one of Daniel's visions. In his vision Daniel at first sees 'the one of great age' and the court of heaven with all the nations assembled and the books, in which human actions both good and bad are recorded, were opened. Then as he 'gazed into the visions of the night, Daniel sees 'coming on the clouds of heaven one like the son of man,' an individual. (Jesus refers to himself as 'son of man.')

On this son of man is conferred sovereignty, glory, kingship 'which will never pass away nor will his empire ever be destroyed.' The transfiguration gives us a glimpse of Jesus' glory.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 96.1-2,5-6,9, is a reflection on the first reading possibly referring to the end of time.

The **Second Reading** is from the second letter of St Peter. This letter claims to have been written by the apostle himself, he is named in the opening address, the prediction of Peter's death is made by Jesus to the author himself who claims to have witnessed the transfiguration and who alludes to a former letter namely 1 Peter. The purpose of the letter is twofold: 1. To warn against false teachers, ch.2 and 2. To allay anxiety due to the delay in the *parousia* i.e. the second coming of Christ, ch.3. Most critics today reject Petrine authorship but the writer may claim to represent Peter being one of Peter's disciples. The Church accepts the letter as canonical from the apostolic age teaching that all Christians share in the divine nature, the scriptures are inspired, the *parousia* will come followed by a new world free of injustice after the old world has been destroyed by fire.

The reading, 1.16-19, comes from the beginning of the letter where 'Peter' is giving witness to what he learnt and saw as an apostle who walked with the Lord. He says that 'when we told you about the power of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' 'Peter' along with others who proclaim the Good News did not 'slavishly repeat cleverly invented myths.' This is a warning against Gnostic teaching, 'Peter' and the apostles pass on facts of which they are eyewitnesses. 'Peter' says we i.e. himself with James and John saw 'his majesty with our own eyes' i.e. at the transfiguration. 'Peter' goes on to speak of the voice of God from the cloud: *'This is my Son, the beloved; he enjoys my favour.'* This confirms the words of prophets and 'Peter' commends the words of the prophets as a guiding lamp in the dark until their minds are enlightened with their faith in Jesus Christ, the morning star rising in their minds. The transfiguration is a preliminary glimpse of scriptural prophecy being fulfilled.