

The Transfiguration of Our Lord, Old Testament, Year C

CATASTROPHE!

Exodus 34:29-35

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Analysis by Marcus Felde

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³²Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

DIAGNOSIS: Glory Better Unseen

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Run for Your Life!

“Aaron and all the Israelites” shrank from Moses. “They were afraid to come near him” because his face was shining, and they thought the taboo on seeing the Lord extended to seeing a reflection of the glory of the Lord in the face of a person.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Aversive Behavior

They were afraid to come near him because his shining face was a sign of his proximity to a Lord they were afraid of. They had history with the Lord, and it was not the sort of history which made them run towards him. The more Moses hung out with the Lord, the more their aversion for the Lord attached itself to Moses.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): To See God’s Glory Is to Die

And no wonder. Hadn’t the Lord said “. . . for no one shall see me and live” (Exodus 33)? So when God spoke clearly through Moses, the people’s uniform reaction was “Catastrophe!”

There is no Good News in the OT lesson for this day. Things only got a little better when Moses accommodated their aversion to seeing the hurtful glory of the Lord by putting a veil over his face. Instead, we turn to the day’s Gospel for a corresponding–yet radically different–experience of the glory of God. Not by people who were more worthy than the people of

Israel, but by people who were experiencing God's saving mercy.

PROGNOSIS: Glory Worth Seeing

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): To See God's Glory Is to Live

Perhaps I am wrong about this, but I think that when Moses and Elijah discussed with Jesus "his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem," they may have been discussing how it would not be like their own peculiar departures. Jesus' cross might have left his followers wondering about how he would accomplish his mission, but his rising would leave behind a resurrection people, who would live in him.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Wanting to Keep Seeing Jesus

Seeing Jesus "in glory" with Moses and Elijah, Peter and his companions, despite being weighed down with sleep, had stayed awake and BEGGED to be able to stay and keep watch. Something in Jesus, something about Jesus, had led them to believe that "in him was life." Their eyes were fixed on him, *even though* Jesus was appearing in glory. They did not want to run away from life!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Living with the Glory of God

In the brief story that forms the second half of today's Gospel

reading, the power of God and the glory of God are experienced in a healing—not killing—way. “Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.” The same could be said of what Jesus did for the whole world, to the glory of God the Father.