

Law was full of shadows and terrors. In the New Law, He appears in a bright cloud, because the New Law brings truth, glory and love. So S. Chrysostom, Theophylact and Damascene *On the Transfiguration*.

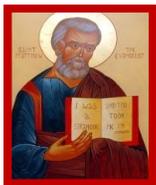
And behold a Voice, &c. The Voice, namely, of God the Father to Christ. Observe, 1., with S. Chrysostom, Ambrose, Toletus, and others, that it is plain from Luke ix. 34 *et seq.* that this voice sounded from a cloud high above the earth. Wherefore S. Peter in his Epistle speaks of it as coming from heaven. It must have come *after* the departure of Moses and Elias. And with this object, that it might be perfectly clear and certain to the Apostles that this voice was addressed to Christ alone, and not to Moses, or Elias, who had now gone away, inasmuch as this voice was a work, *ad extra*, to use the expression employed by theologians, it proceeded from the whole Trinity. The voice was formed by an angel, since God makes use of His angels for these exterior works.

Observe. 2. That in this transfiguration, equally as in the Baptism of Christ, the Trinity was symbolically represented. The Holy Ghost was represented by the cloud, the Father by the voice, the Son by the Divine glory and brightness, by which likewise was set forth the Incarnation of the WORD. For Christ was seen as man, and by the splendour and the voice of God the Father it was signified that He was also God. The Holy Ghost was adumbrated by the cloud, because He, like a bright cloud, enlightens man, protects him, and makes him fruitful to every good work. He also blesses and glorifies. Hence in the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, because in Baptism He gives innocence. But in the Transfiguration, which is a type of the resurrection, He came under the appearance of a cloud, because He gave then, and will give in the resurrection security from all evils.

This is My beloved Son: "Two pleasant words," says S. Cyprian (*de Baptismo*), "*Son and Beloved*, coming from the mouth of God, are impressed upon our senses, that the association of names may unite us in the community of gifts, and such great names of sweetness may soften our minds, and kindle the ardour of devotion." Moreover, "God the Father said not, 'in this is My Son,' lest One from Another being placed apart, they should be supposed to be divided: but that according to the dispensation of Their union They should be simply taken to be One and the same," says the Council of Ephesus (*ex prosphonet. Cyril Imperator*)

Beloved, Syriac, most Beloved. There is an allusion to Ps. xxix. 4. "The Voice of the Lord is in magnificence, &c., and beloved as a son of the unicorns." I have explained the various analogies between Christ and a unicorn on 2 Pet. i. 17.

Hear him, not Moses, who has gone away, but Christ, as the new legislator of the New Law. These words, *hear Him* were not said of Christ at His Baptism, because He was then for the first time shown to the world; but now He is set forth as a Teacher and Lawgiver. Therefore (as Tertullian, S. Leo, Damascene, and others maintain) these words denote the abrogation of the Old Law, and the inauguration of the New.



For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Matthew 17: 1-5

Douay Rheims Version

*The Transfiguration of Christ: He cures the lunatic child:
foretells his passion; and pays the didrachma.*

1. And after six days Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart::
2. And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow.
3. And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him.
4. And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

that by it he might correct Peter's wish concerning the three tabernacles, by showing that Christ had no need of such things, forasmuch as His throne is a light and glorious cloud. Wherefore it is more probable that, as Franc. Lucas thinks, Peter, James, and John were within, not on the outside of this cloud: for the disciples were near to Christ and were His house and family. And for this very reason were these three Apostles brought up to the top of Tabor, that they might be sure witnesses to the rest of the Apostles and to the faithful what things were done in the cloud round about Christ; and especially might bear testimony to God the Father's voice, *This is my Son*. Therefore it was meet that they should see and hear all those things plainly and visibly, without a veil, or cloud, so that they might be eye and ear witnesses, above all suspicion of possibility of having been deceived, or mistaken. Moreover, the cloud is not only the veil, but the symbol of the glory of God. Hence of old time God was wont to manifest His incomprehensible majesty to the Hebrews, as is plain from Exod. xix. 9, and other passages. Wherefore the cloud is called the Ascention, or the chariot of God (Psalm civ. 3): also His tabernacle, His throne, and the seat not only of His majesty, but of the omnipotence of God, and the supreme power of His working. For from the clouds He hurls against His enemies hailstones and whirlwinds, thunderings and lightnings. (Psalm xviii. 12, &c.) Hence also when Christ shall come to judge the world, He will come in the clouds of Heaven. This cloud therefore was as it were an instrument for the voice of God the Father; an ornament and grace for Jesus Christ: and for the Apostles a covert.

Moreover with reference to this cloud, Toletus is of opinion that Christ was transfigured in the night, during the time of sleep. And this was why, as Luke says, *the eyes of the Apostles were heavy*: therefore too Christ's transfiguration appeared the more wonderful. For so great splendour is more marvellous by night than it would be by day. But others, with greater probability, think Christ was transfigured at the dawning of the day. They assign two reasons: first that what was done might not seem to be the work of magic or nocturnal spectres. Secondly, because Christ came for works of light: and the eyes of the Apostles were heavy on account of fatigue. Lastly, the dawn is on the confines between light and darkness. It is a delightful hour, and so the symbol of glory.

The cloud was bright, 1. As an indication of the glory of Christ. Whence Cajetan thinks that this cloud derived its brightness from the light and glory of the body of Christ; or better, because by it was represented the glory and majesty of the Father whose voice was heard. Whence Peter calls this cloud (2 Peter i. 17) the *excellent glory* of the Father, Who spake out of it; and Who by means of it increased the glory of the transfiguration of Christ. This cloud therefore was full of majesty and glory.

2. For the signification of the difference between the Old Law and the New. In the Old Law, God appeared to the Jews in a black cloud, because that

Him who is the good of the universe on this mountain 3. Because, being as yet subject to death and suffering, he desired to enjoy with James and John alone that blessedness to which God, through Christ, designed to bring an innumerable multitude after this life. 4. Because he wished to have glory before labour, a crown before the battle, joy before the cross, when it behoved Christ and Christians first to suffer, and so to enter into their glory. For the cross is the way and the ladder to happiness. 5. Because he placed his happiness in the sight of the glorified Humanity of Christ, not in the vision of the Godhead. If, therefore, Peter had beheld the glory of the Divinity and the abyss of all joy and all goodness, what would he have said? For this vision and pleasure of Peter were sensible and corporeal, and were only like a single crumb or drop in comparison with the joy and pleasure, which the blessed experience in beholding God, when they immerse themselves in Him as in a sea of delight, and are swallowed up in it, according to those words of the thirty-sixth Psalm: "They shall be inebriated from the fatness of Thine house, and Thou shalt give them to drink of the torrent of pleasure." Moreover, this vision of the glory of Christ, of Moses, and of Elias raised in the disciples not only vast pleasure, but wonder and reverence likewise, and a kind of sacred dread. Wherefore Mark says, *they were sore afraid*.

Verse 5- *While he was yet speaking.* Observe Luke has, *while he was yet speaking, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they feared as they entered into the cloud.* Which Toletus explains thus: Whilst Peter is saying *Let us make here three tabernacles*, the cloud (contradicting him) interposed between Christ, Moses, and Elias on the one part, and the disciples on the other, and thus *overshadowed them*—that is to say, the disciples; and the glory of Christ, dazzling the eyes of the disciples, was tempered by the intervention of this cloud, so that He could be more easily seen by them. *And they—i.e., the disciples—feared when they entered into the cloud; i.e.,* when they beheld the cloud embracing Christ and Moses and Elias, and themselves shut off from them by the cloud. *They feared*, I say, because they saw that they were on the outside of the cloud, and because they were alone, and there was no one to defend them in case any evil should befall them. Or else *they feared* lest Christ and Moses and Elias should go somewhere else, or lest He should be carried away from them into Heaven, as Elias had been carried away in his chariot of fire.

2. Barradi thinks that the cloud came *after* the departure of Moses and Elias, for Luke had previously said concerning them (verse 33), *And it came to pass as they departed from them, Peter said, &c. After that, the cloud overshadowed them, i.e.,* Christ and the disciples, who were left alone. *And they feared*, because they saw themselves *entering into the cloud*, girt round about with it, and they did not know what was about to happen to them.

Instead of, *as they entered into the cloud* (Luke ix. 34), the Syriac translates, *when they saw Moses and Elias, who were entering into the cloud.* And instead of, *as they departed from Him*, the Arabic has, *and when they wished to go away from Him.*

You will ask, from whence, and why was this cloud? The answer is, it was made by God through the instrumentality of an angel, by the condensation of air and vapour,

5. And as he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.
6. And the disciples hearing fell upon their face, and were very much afraid.
7. And Jesus came and touched them: and said to them: Arise, and fear not.
8. And they lifting up their eyes, saw no one, but only Jesus.
9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying: Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen from the dead.
10. And his disciples asked him, saying: Why then do the scribes say that Elias must come first?
11. But he answering, said to them: Elias indeed shall come, and restore all things.
12. But I say to you, that Elias is already come, and they knew him not, But have done unto him whatsoever they had a mind. So also the Son of man shall suffer from them.
13. Then the disciples understood, that he had spoken to them of John the Baptist.
14. And when he was come to the multitude, there came to him a man falling down on his knees before him saying: Lord, have pity on my son, for he is a lunatic, and suffereth much: for he falleth often into the fire, and often into the water.
15. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.
16. Then Jesus answered and said: O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me.
17. And Jesus rebuked him, and the devil went out of him, and the child was cured from that hour.
18. Then came the disciples to Jesus secretly, and said: Why could not we cast him out?
19. Jesus said to them: Because of your unbelief. For, amen I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain: Remove from hence hither, and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible to you.
20. But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.
21. And when they abode together in Galilee, Jesus said to them: The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:
22. And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall rise again. And they were troubled exceedingly.
23. And when they were come to Capharnaum, they that received the didrachmas, came to Peter, and said to him: Doth not your master pay the didrachma?
24. He said: Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying: What is thy opinion, Simon? The kings of the earth, of whom do they receive tribute or custom, of their own children, or of strangers?
25. And he said: Of strangers. Jesus said to him: Then the children are free.

26. But that we may not scandalize them, go to the sea, and cast in a hook: and that fish which shall first come up, take: and when thou hast opened it's mouth, thou shalt find a stater: take that, and give it to them for me and thee.

Verse 1- *And after six days, &c.* There seems to be here a discrepancy with Luke ix. 28, who says, *it came to pass about an eight days after these things.* S. Jerome answers, "The solution is simple, because in S. Matthew the intervening days are given; in S. Luke there is an addition of the first and the last day." Matthew then and Mark do not count the first day, in which Christ spoke what we have heard, and gave the promise of His Transfiguration; nor yet the last and eighth, because Christ was transfigured on the morning of it. Luke indeed only counts the entire days, and therefore says, *about.* Christ put off His promised Transfiguration for six days that, as S. Chrysostom says, the rest of the disciples might not feel any movement of envy. The second reason for delay was because Christ wished to be transfigured on Mount Tabor, which is distant from Cæsarea Philippi twenty leagues. Christ therefore journeying slowly according to His custom, occupied six days in preaching in the villages and country intervening. Rabanus gives a third and mystical reason—that it might be signified that the resurrection, of which the Transfiguration was a type, should take place after the six ages of the world. Origen gives a fourth reason, that it might be signified, that he alone, who transcends all worldly things (for the world was made in six days) is able to ascend above the mount on high and to behold the WORD of God.

Peter, James, and John: "He took up these three," says S. Chrysostom "because they were greater than the rest." Christ selected these three Apostles, and manifested His glory to them, because He willed to show the same His weakness and agony in the garden, lest they should be offended at it, and that they might know that Christ thereby was proceeding to the glory which had been shown to them. For from this glory, and from the Father's words *This is My Son*, they might know assuredly that Christ was very God; but that He was hiding His Deity beneath the veil of the flesh; and that although he suffered and died upon the cross, His Deity neither suffered nor died. And He who could communicate so great a glory to His body, was indeed able to rescue that body from death if He so willed. Hear Damascene (*Orat. de Transfig.*): "He took Peter wishing to show him that the testimony which he had borne was confirmed by the testimony of the Father; and because he was about to become the president of the whole Church. He took James because he was about to die for Christ. John, because he was, as it were, the most pure instrument of theology, that beholding the glory of the Son of God, which is not subject to time, he might declare, *In the beginning was the Word.*"

James, &c. This was James the Greater, who was the first of the Apostles to suffer martyrdom. S. Augustine (*in cap. 2. ad Galat.*) seems by a slip of memory to have thought that this was the Lord's brother.

Mystically. These three denote that those whom God prefers above others to behold the vision and glory of Himself are of a threefold order. Peter denotes the fervent in charity; John, a virgin, signifies virgins; James, the first martyr among the Apostles,

Verse 4- *Peter answered . . . it is good* (that is, *pleasant, sweet, and blessed*), &c. Peter here—exulting in the glory and, as it were, intoxicated—desired to abide in it, and enjoy it always; whence the Arabic translates, *it is good that we should remain here.* Damascene well observes, "It is not good for thee, O Peter, that Christ should tarry there: if He did, thou wouldst not obtain the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, nor would death have been abolished. Seek not felicity before the time, as Adam sought to be a god."

Theophylact remarks, We must not say with Peter, *it is good for us to be here*, since we ought ever to be going forward, and not remain in one degree of virtue and contemplation, but we ought to pass on to others.

You will ask how Peter knew that the two persons who were talking with Jesus were Moses and Elias? I answer, first, that he might have recognised them from what they said. For Moses seems to have said to Christ—Hail, Messiah, our Saviour! Thou art He Whose Passion I prefigured by so many sacrifices, especially by the slain Lamb and the Passover. Elias may have said, Thou art He Whose resurrection I set forth by the widow's son whom I recalled to life, and Whose ascension I prefigured when I was caught up to Heaven in a chariot of fire.—It may be also, that Christ addressed them by their names.

2. Peter might have recognised them by their appearance and dress, as they were described in Scripture and the tradition of the elders. Thus, Elias might be known by his leathern girdle and sheepskin, wherewith he was wont to be clothed. Moses might be known by his horned face. Indeed, if we can believe Origen, Moses appeared with the tables of the Law, Elias with a chariot of fire.

3, and most probably, Peter knew them by Divine inspiration. You will ask why Peter desired that these three tabernacles should be made, since the blessed do not need tabernacles? I reply, Peter said this towards the close of the Transfiguration, when Moses and Elias were about to depart, in order that he might detain them. For Luke says, *And it came to pass as they were departing from Him, Peter said, &c.;* as though he said, "O how sweet and delectable it is to abide in this vision! Wherefore, O Christ, suffer not Moses and Elias to go away; and that we may keep them, let us make them a habitation, a tabernacle for each, in which they may abide." It was for them, not for himself and James and John, he wished the tabernacles to be made. Mark adds, *for he knew not what he said.* It was as though Peter being inebriated with the sweetness of this vision, in order that he might prolong it, spoke, as if bereft of reason, things incongruous. He was in a sort of delirium. And that, first, because he thought Christ in His glory, as well as Moses and Elias, needed tabernacles, and three of them, as though one would not have sufficed. Again, he put Moses and Elias on an equality with Christ. 2. Because he wished Christ to remain on Tabor, and to shut up

agreed by all that it was Elias himself who appeared in his own body. For Elias was taken up to Heaven in a chariot of fire, and is still alive, that he may come again and contend with Antichrist. From Paradise, therefore, or from the place to which he was translated, he was suddenly transferred by an angel to Mount Tabor, that he might converse with Christ in His Transfiguration. With respect to Moses there are various opinions which I have reviewed on the last chapter of Deuteronomy. It is certain, as I have there shown, that Moses is dead, and has not as yet risen again. Some think that this was not Moses who really appeared, but an angel in the form of Moses. But this is certainly an error, says Suarez, because Moses is introduced as a witness of Christ; and a witness must bear testimony in his own person. None therefore of the expositors say that this was not Moses but an angel, except the *Gloss* on Luke ix. 30, which S. Thomas thinks is taken from the author of *The Miracles of Scripture* (*lib.* 3, *caps.* 10 & 13). Jansen thinks it more probable that this *Gloss* is derived from S. Augustine (*lib. de cura pro mortuis*), where S. Augustine expresses himself as doubtful whether the apparitions of the departed take place by themselves appearing, or by means of angels; or rather, as he says, in both ways. But he expresses no doubt as to the appearance of Moses in this place. Yea, even Calvin, although he says it is probable that this was the spectre of Moses, adds that it is more probable that it was the real soul of Moses. The soul then of Moses was translated from Limbus by an angel to the earth. And when Moses was arrived thither, he came to Tabor to Christ, and assumed a body, either formed by an angel out of air, as Lyra, Salmeron, and S. Thomas think, or else resumed his own body, so that he rose again. And thus the soul of Moses was led by an angel to his sepulchre, and there his ashes were collected by the angel and formed into a body, to which the power of God re-united his soul. And thus it was the true and living Moses, whom the angel transferred from his sepulchre to Mount Tabor. For it was meet that in witnessing to Christ, everything should be real and solid, and that Christ by thus raising up Moses should show that He is both the Lord and the judge of the quick and the dead. This is the opinion of Tertullian, Origen, Irenæus, and others; whom Suarez cites and follows (3 *p. q.* 45, *disp.* 22, *sect.* 2). If you follow this opinion, and suppose that Moses rose again, you must suppose that he again died, and that he again rose with others after the Resurrection of Christ. For Christ was the first of all who arose unto the life immortal.

Observe, Christ communicated His glory and splendour to Moses and Elias. Wherefore Luke says, *Moses and Elias were seen in glory.*

Talking with Him: Luke adds, *and spake of His decease.* The Greek for *decease* is not *ἐκστασις* (as though the ecstatic love of Christ, which drove Him to the cross, were signified, as some pious people have thought), but *ἐξοδος*, *i.e.*, *going forth*—namely, from Jerusalem, and from this life, by the death of the cross on Mount Calvary. This Moses and Elias here foretold to Christ in the hearing of the Apostles, that they might take away, both from them and us, the offence of the cross. Thus it is that some—with S. Chrysostom—instead of *ἐξοδον* read *δόξαν*, *i.e.*, *glory*; for on the cross Christ chiefly manifested His power and glory. Wherefore at that time the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the earth quaked.

denotes those who suffer, and martyrs. Wouldst thou then see God? Be thou a Peter, *i.e.*, firm in virtue; be thou a John in chastity; be thou a James by mortifying thy vices.

Into a high mountain, &c. This mountain, by its loftiness, represents the height of the empyrean and of the celestial glory; and to teach, *tropologically*, says Remigius, “that it is necessary for all who desire to contemplate God, that they must not wallow in grovelling pleasures, but by love of things above must be lifted up to heaven. Moreover they are led up by themselves apart, because holy men are separated from the wicked in their minds, and by the intention of their faith, and shall be wholly separated in the world to come.” For, as Bede says, they who expect the fruit of the resurrection ought to dwell in their mind in high places, and give themselves up to constant prayer.

You will ask what mountain this was? The common opinion is that it was Mount Tabor. This is the opinion of the Fathers and of the faithful, so that it appears to be a tradition of the Church; and therefore Mount Tabor is accounted by Christians to be holy. It was made famous by pilgrimages, as S. Jerome testifies (*Epist.* 27.). For all who make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, visit Tabor equally with Bethlehem, Mount Calvary, and Olivet. Thus S. Paula, twelve hundred years ago, when visiting the holy places, visited Tabor. For as S. Jerome says eloquently in her epitaph, “She climbed Mount Tabor, on which Christ was transfigured.”

That Christ was transfigured on Tabor is taught expressly by S. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catech.* 12), Damascene (*Serm. de Transfig.*), Bede and Euthymius, Abulensis, Maldonatus, Jansen, Adrichomius (*Descript. terræ sanct.*) and others, *passim*. Damascene confirms this from the words in Psalm lxxxix, 12, “Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy Name.” For Hermon rejoiced when it heard the Father’s voice at the Baptism of Christ; Tabor, when it saw Christ transfigured upon it. Then Tabor contended with the empyrean, being as it were the image and the theatre of celestial glory. For as the p248 blessed beheld the glory of God in heaven, so the Apostles beheld the glory of Christ on Tabor. Bede says, that in memory of Christ’s transfiguration in the presence of Moses and Elias three tabernacles were built on Mount Tabor, according to Peter’s wish, *Let us make here three tabernacles.* Nicephorus (*lib.* 8, *cap.* 30.) adds that S. Helena erected a splendid church on Tabor in memory of the Transfiguration. To this temple were afterwards joined two monasteries, one dedicated to Elias, the other to Moses.

Christ chose Tabor for the manifestation of His glory, 1. because it was near to Nazareth, where He was conceived, and the **WORD** was made Flesh. 2. Because Tabor is nigh to Sharon, concerning which Isaiah sings (xxxv. 2): “The glory of Lebanon is given unto it, the beauty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God.”

3. Because Tabor is an *exceeding high mountain*. Josephus (*lib. 4, de bello, c. 2*) says it is 30 stadia in height, or nearly four Italian miles. 4. Because as Bede says, Tabor is in the middle of the Galilean plain, three miles to the north of Gennesaret. It is round on all sides, rising with a gentle elevation from the plain; it is covered with grass and flowers, and is exceedingly pleasant; it is a sort of paradise. Adrichomius adds that the climate of Tabor is exceedingly salubrious; it is planted all over with vines, olives, and various sorts of fruit and other trees. It is verdant with constant dews, with the foliage of trees and green grass; and is always fragrant with the odour of all kinds of flowers. There is there a vast concourse of birds, who make delicious melody with their songs. On the exact spot of the Lord's Transfiguration there is at present a garden, planted with trees and irrigated by fountains and surrounded by a wall. The people who live at the foot of the mountain do not allow anyone to approach this spot out of reverence and devotion.

Symbolically: Tabor in Hebrew is the same as bed of purity and light. תַּבְּרוֹרָה ta means bed, and אֹרֶךְ light, and the beth in the middle signifies in. Thus it is, the bed in light. S. Jerome (Hosea, c. 5) gives another meaning. Tabor, he says, means the coming light. Again, Tabor may be translated, ta, i.e., a bed and bor, i.e., a cistern or sepulchre; because on Tabor Moses and Elias spake of the decease of Christ. For by this way Christ must needs go to His glory and to Heaven, and we must go by the same way. Luke adds, Christ went up into the mountain to pray; and it came to pass whilst He was praying the fashion of His countenance was altered, that He might show us the fruit of prayer—namely, that in prayer we are suffused with heavenly light, and are, as it were, transfigured; and instead of earthly are made celestial and divine; and instead of men become angels. Moses was a type of this when he talked with God upon Mount Sinai, and the glory of the Lord appeared unto him, and there were horns (i.e., rays of light) on his face. But this splendour of Moses came from without; but the glory of Christ from within, i.e., from His soul and Deity.

Verse 2- *And was transfigured, &c.* Greek, *μετεμορφώθη, i.e., was transformed.* So also the Syriac. The Arabic is, *He showed His glory in their presence.*

You will inquire after what manner Christ was transfigured? I take it for granted that nothing was done here in a fanciful or fantastic manner, or in the way of illusion. There could be nothing of this sort in Christ.

I say, then, in the first place—Christ did not transfigure Himself before His three Apostles to manifest His Divinity to them, as He does to the saints in Heaven; for it cannot be beheld by any means with eyes of flesh. So the Fathers, *passim*. Wherefore Tertullian, SS. Chrysostom, Leo, and Damascene (who seem to speak otherwise) only mean to say that Christ showed His Apostles the external glory of His body, which was an index of His Divinity; that by it, as through a chink, they might in some sort behold the glory and majesty of His Godhead, even though veiled by the body.

2. Christ in His transfiguration did not change the essential form, fashion, colour, or other qualities of His countenance, but—as Euthymius rightly observes—He assumed a marvellous and, as it were, Divine splendour, so that He shone like the sun, yea with

Verse 3- *And behold there appeared, &c.* You will ask why these two appeared, rather than any of the other prophets? Maldonatus answers, because these two shall precede Christ's second Advent to Judgment, when He shall come in His glorious Majesty, of which the Transfiguration was a type. This is true with respect to Elias, but wrong with regard to Moses, as I have shown on Rev. xi. 3 and 4, where I have proved that Enoch, not Moses shall come with Elias against Antichrist.

I say then, that the reason was because Moses was the legislator of the Old Law, and Elias was the prince of the Prophets. Wherefore he represents the whole choir of the Prophets. These two appeared then, that they might show that Christ was the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world promised by the Law and the Prophets. By Moses the Law is shown to end in Christ, and prophecy by Elias; and that both had accomplished their work, and had given place to Christ as the new Lawgiver and Prophet sent from God, and promised by all the Prophets, but especially by Moses, in those words, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up from the midst of your brethren, like unto me: and I will put My words in His mouth." (Deut. xviii. 18.) Thus SS. Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose. S. Jerome adds that Moses and Elias were blessed with this vision, because like Christ they had fasted forty days and forty nights. Hence Tertullian, Origen, Nazianzen and others think this vision of Christ's Humanity in the transfiguration was represented and promised to Elias when God manifested Himself to him by the breath of a gentle gale (1 Kings xix. 12 and to Moses, when he asked to see God's face, and God said to him, "Thou shalt see My back parts, but My Face thou canst not see." (Exodus xxxiii. 23.) This cannot be true in a literal, but only in a symbolical sense.

S. Thomas (3 *p. quæst.* 45, *art.* 3, *ad 2*) gives six other reasons: 1. Because the multitudes said that He was Elias, or Jeremias, or one of the Prophets, He took the chief of the Prophets with Him, that he might declare the difference between the Master and the servants. 2. Because Moses gave the Law, and Elias was jealous for the glory of the Lord: since therefore they appeared with Christ, they excluded the calumny of the Jews, that Christ was a blasphemer of the Law, and that He usurped to Himself the glory of God. 3. He showed that He had the power of life and death, and is the judge of quick and dead, because He had with Him Moses who was dead and Elias who was yet alive. 4. Because, as Luke says, *they spake of his decease*, that is, of His Passion and Death. Therefore that He might, in reference to this, strengthen the minds of His disciples, He brings before them those who had exposed themselves to death for God's sake. For Moses presented himself before Pharaoh at the peril of his life, as Elias did before Ahab. 5. Because He wished His disciples to imitate the meekness of Moses and the zeal of Elias. 6. Because He would show that He was preached both by the Law and the Prophets.

You will ask—how and in what manner did Moses and Elias appear? It is

standing, when He was transfigured: *When they awoke, they beheld His glory, and two men standing with Him* who was standing likewise. Hence it follows that Christ was not lifted up into the air, as some painters represent Him, but was transfigured as He stood upon His feet.

His raiment became white—some read, *as the light*: thus the Greek, ὡς τὸ φῶς. Thus also the Syriac and the Arabic. The Egyptian has, *His face shone gloriously like the sun; His raiment also was resplendent after the fashion of the sun*. The Ethiopic has, *His garments were like crystal*. But the Vulg. reads with the Persian ὡς χιῶν, *like snow*. This is the reading of some Gr. MSS. in this place, and of all in Mark ix. 3. For snow is properly said to be *white*, and light, *shining*: although snow not only is white, but also shines. Abulensis (*quest. 42 et seq.*) is of opinion that this brightness of Christ's raiment was a true and real property: and that therefore the colour of His garments was changed, in such manner that if they were previously black, they were made white, and if they were previously white, they became whiter still: and that when the transfiguration was over they returned to their former condition.

S. Mark's words seem in favour of this opinion, *And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them*.

Christ's garments therefore had two properties; namely a snow-like whiteness like a fuller's, and a supernatural splendour bestowed upon them by God. The far more general opinion is that the whiteness was identical with the brightness. For brightness is white, but it adds splendour to the whiteness. And this refulgence, by the operation of God, flowed forth as it were from the flesh of Christ into His garments, and thus prevailed over, and as it were swallowed up their natural colour, if it were not white originally. Wherefore this glory in the face and the body of Christ was golden and shining, as in the sun. And when it was transfused to His clothes, it became white, as the moon appears to be white, when illuminated by the sun's rays. And the sun itself appears white, when it shines through clouds. Thus Tertullian (*lib. iv. cont. Marc. c. 22.*) So S. Ephrem, and many others. We shall get a full and adequate meaning by uniting both opinions, and say that the garments of Christ were indeed made white, through that snowlike whiteness which God now bestowed upon them, and that they were likewise resplendent through the brightness infused into them by means of the radiant face and flesh of Christ. For this is what Luke means when he says, *His raiment was white and glistening*. Gr. ἐξαστράπτων, *ie., like lightning, darting rays like lightning*. Whence it is plain that there was in the garments of Christ not only whiteness like snow, but a brightness like lightning. For white is the most perfect colour; and light, or splendour is the most noble of all sensible qualities; and lightning has the nature of fire, and is the most penetrating of all things.

Trpologically: the garments of Christ are the Saints. They adorn Him like clothes: and like snow they are chaste and shine through their purity.

even greater and more august glory. Wherefore Matthew, explaining the expression *He was transfigured*, subjoins *and his face did shine like the sun*. And Luke, *The fashion of His countenance was altered, i.e., was bright and luminous*. (*See S. Thomas 3, p. q. 45.*) By transfiguration, therefore, is meant that Christ transformed the external appearance of His face into a more glorious and august one. For Christ did not upon this occasion assume the other endowments of a glorified body—such as impassibility, swiftness, and so on—but of glory only.

Here observe, in the first place, that this glory of Christ pertained not only to His face, but to His hands also and His whole body, as S. Jerome clearly teaches (*Epist. 61, ad Pammach.*). For although Abulensis and others think that only the face of Christ shone, since Matthew and Mark make mention only of it, it is better to understand that the entire Body of Christ was resplendent, because it was a full and perfect transfiguration. Whence the glory passed to His raiment. So S. Ephrem (*Orat. de Transfig.*): "His raiment became white. Verily the Evangelist shows that the glory emanated from His whole body, and rays of glory shone from all His members." S. Augustine (*lib. 3 de Mirabil. S. Script. c. 10*) says: "As the Divinity shone outwardly through the flesh, so also the flesh, being illuminated by the Divinity, was radiant through His garments." This is the opinion also of S. Ambrose (*in Symb. c. 22*), Origen (*in cap. ix. Levit.*), Barradi, Suarez, and others; some of whom think that this splendour penetrated Christ's whole body and rendered it translucent. But others, with greater probability, think that the glory pertained only to the superficies of His Body; and that that is the meaning of the word *Transfiguration*—that is, a change of the *figure*, which has to do with what is external. This splendour was celestial, yea more than celestial; it was divine and beatific, such as belongs to glorified bodies. Wherefore it was golden and glorious, like the sun; but yet it gave refreshment to the eyes, and did not take away the sight of Christ from His Apostles. In this it was different from the light of the sun.

Note, secondly, that this splendour, as well as the other gifts of a glorified body, appertained to the body of Christ throughout the whole time of His life, from the very moment of His Conception. Nevertheless, in order that Christ might suffer and have His conversation among men, this glory and all the other gifts which I have spoken of were held back, as it were, in the beatified soul of Christ, so that it did not infuse them into His body by means of a physical emanation. Otherwise they would have shone through His body, like light through a lantern. This repression, therefore, was a miracle. And the cessation of this repression in the transfiguration, and emanation of the interior splendour into the body of Christ was the cessation of a miracle. But to men it seemed to be a miracle, because it was new, and they were ignorant of the cause. Wherefore Christ possessed this glory of His body by a double right, namely, in right of the Hypostatic Union, and also by the title of merit. For by so many sufferings and labours He merited this glory of His body, and at His resurrection He received it in

perpetuity, as theologians teach, *passim*. Wherefore what some persons have thought—that Christ always possessed this glory and these gifts in His body, but that they were not visible to men on account of the infirmity of human sight; even as some say the glory of the bodies of the blessed would be invisible to the eyes of mortals, unless some new power of sight were given them—this opinion, I say, is not probable because that light of the glorified body is corporeal, and therefore, in a higher degree, visible to the eyes of all.

Lastly the Transfiguration happened on the 6th of August, on which day the Church commemorates it. Ammonius, Baronius, Jansen, Suarez, and others, agree that it took place in the thirty-third year of Christ's life, which was the third and last of His preaching.

You will ask in the second place, why Christ was transfigured? I answer: 1, that by means of this glory and brightness, and by the testimony of Elias and Moses He might prove His Divinity to His Apostles. 2. That he might forewarn His disciples not to lose confidence, when they should behold Him nailed to the cross. 3. That He might indicate that He shall come after this manner with great power and majesty to judge the world. So S. Ephrem, Cyril, and Damascene, S. Basil (*in Psalm 45*), and others. Wherefore also Elias appeared, who will be the precursor of Christ when He comes to judgment. 4. That He might animate the faith and hope and courage and zeal of the Apostles and the rest of the faithful bravely to undergo all crosses for the sake of the Gospel through the hope of obtaining the like glory at the resurrection. Thus S. Leo says, "The Lord was transfigured, that He might take away the scandal of the cross from the hearts of His disciples." And S. Chrysostom adds, that the least of the blessed in Heaven has greater brightness and glory than Christ had at His Transfiguration; because Christ attempted His glory to feeble eyes and the capacity of the, as yet, mortal Apostles. They whom the truth of the celestial glory irradiates count as utterly worthless all the pomps and vanities of this world. Wherefore S. Francis was wont to say, "So great is the glory which I expect, that every kind of affliction is delightful to me.

Symbolically: This Transfiguration represents the varied and wonderful transformations of the WORD incarnate, as it were a Divine Proteus. For Christ was four times transfigured. First in His Incarnation, when the WORD being made flesh, shone in it as a light in a lantern. 2. On the Cross, on which He was so *deformed* with stripes and nails and spitting, that as Isaiah says, "He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we saw Him, He had no beauty." (c. liii.) 3. In the Resurrection, when He was crowned with glory and honour. 4. In the Eucharist, where he lies hid under the forms of bread and wine, and seems to be, as it were, transfigured into them. For transubstantiation is a sort of transfiguration of the accidents.

Anagogically: Christ here wished to give a representation of our resurrection glory, when He will re-fashion our bodies to be like unto the body of His glory.

Tropologically: Christ wished, in the first place, to give a type of the transfiguration of a soul dark with sins into that light of grace by which we are made like unto Christ.

For our transfiguration standeth in likeness, or configuration unto Christ; that we should be conformed unto Christ in all humility, charity and obedience; that we should be living images of the life and holiness of Christ; that we should think, speak, and act with such piety, gravity, and zeal as Christ did; that whosoever sees us should think that he beholds Christ in us. Again Christ here gives a representation of the transfiguration by which a soul passes from a lower degree of holiness to a higher degree. For Christ who was already holy was transfigured. This transfiguration is more infrequent and more difficult than the former. For Saints often flatter themselves on account of their sanctity, and as it were rest in it, and do not aspire to higher sanctity, as sinners and penitents aspire to righteousness. It is less frequently, says a Father, that any one is transfigured from less to greater sanctity, than from sin to holiness. It can only take place in the mountain, and by going aside with Christ, that is to say, by frequent and fervent prayer and meditation. For in them the mind is illuminated by God, and draws as through a pipe celestial light, by means of which it conceives fresh ardour to reform its ways, yea to be transformed into Christ, that with S. Paul it may say, "The world is crucified unto me. I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And with S. Francis, it would imprint the five wounds of Christ, if not in its body, yet in the inmost recesses of its soul.

Prayer, then, is the transfiguration of the soul. 1. Because in it the soul receives light from God, that she may know Him and herself and all things more clearly.

2. By it the soul seeks and obtains grace to blot out the stains and vices by which she is deformed. In it she receives consolation for desolation; out of weakness she is made strong; from slothful she becomes fervent; for perplexity, she hath understanding, for sadness, gladness; and for cowardice, courage.

3. She is raised above herself, and is lifted up to God in heaven, where she learns and sees that all the things of earth are fragile and worthless, so that from her lofty height she looks down upon them as fit only for children. She perceives that the true riches, honours and pleasures are nowhere but in heaven.

4. In prayer she unites herself to God. For, "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1. Cor. vi. 17.) Hence S. Francis, when he prayed, was lifted up on high, and could speak, think of and love nothing else save God. "My God and all," he was wont to say, "Grant me, O Lord, to die for love of Thy love, Thou who didst deign to die for love of my love!" This is what S. Paul says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2. Cor. iii. 18.)

Lastly, Mark intimates that Christ was not sitting, nor kneeling, but