

It is interesting that Simon Peter up on the mountain recognized both Moses and Elijah. I doubt very much that these two men were wearing those adhesive labels that read: “Hello, my name is Moses,” “Hello, my name is Elijah.” Peter had never seen either prophet before this. He would have had an idea in his head of how they looked, just as we also do. But such ideas are usually far from reality. Yet up on the mountain he nails it. No guessing. No, “I’ll make three tents; one for You, Jesus, and two more for these other two guys.” Peter calls them by name.

But we really should not be surprised by this. Jesus’ transfiguration allows us a brief peek into heaven itself. Peter, James, and John see Jesus in all His glory. He is surrounded by His saints. It is not just Moses and Elijah who are there with Jesus on that mountain. All the heavenly saints are there. But the three disciples are allowed to see only Moses and Elijah with Jesus. In heaven the saints are known, not only to God, but also to each other. Had you been there with Peter, James, and John on the mountain, you, too, would have recognized Moses and Elijah, for you recognize them now in the Sacred Scriptures. And when the day comes that you are carried into heaven, no introductions will be necessary. You will immediately know every saint there in heaven with you.

So, Jesus’ transfiguration being a glimpse into heaven, why is there such fear within Peter, James, and John? We could understand this fear had these disciples been given a brief peek into hell. But heaven? Fear and terror should be the farthest thing from their minds and hearts. Yet our text clearly tells us, “*they were terrified.*”

Is heaven a scary place? It was for Peter, James, and John. But it was not for Moses and Elijah. They were also up there on the mountain. They were much closer to Jesus, in fact, than were Peter, James, and John. But there was no terror within them. It was only the three disciples who were afraid.

Can we say that at this time in their life they were not ready for heaven? And then ask also: Am I ready? Moses thought that he was. Centuries earlier, that is, when he was up on a different mountain: Mt. Sinai. “*Show me Your glory,*” he told God there. “I’m ready to look into heaven and see Your glorious face.” But at that time in his life Moses was not ready. “*You cannot see My face,*” said God, “*for man shall not see Me and live.*” So God covered Moses with His hand while He passed by.

That was then. Our text tells us the now. Now Moses is ready. Now he and Elijah see the glory of God. They speak with Him, we’re told. And they are not afraid. You see, way back when, Moses had a theology of glory. But now he has a theology of the cross. For St. Luke tells us that what Moses and Elijah were discussing with Jesus was His upcoming departure at Jerusalem – His sufferings and death on the cross of Calvary.

Peter was no such theologian. Not yet. Nor were James and John. Just before our text, Jesus tells His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. But His disciples will not hear of it. Peter even rebukes Jesus for saying such things. No, he and the other disciples are not ready for heaven, because the road to the glory of heaven is the road of suffering and death.

So, let's ask ourselves once again: Am I ready for heaven? Well, we could ask this instead: Am I baptized? For there in those waters you were crucified with Christ. There you died with Him to be raised with Him.

There is a reason why we make the sign of the holy cross when we remember our baptism. It is why the sign of the cross was made upon you when you were baptized. Your baptism marks you as one for whom Christ suffered and died. It brings His cross to you with all the heavenly gifts He purchased for you by His sufferings and death. We simply cannot be theologians of glory when we remember our baptism into Christ, for our baptism places us under His cross.

Think of that criminal who hung on a cross next to Jesus. Your baptism puts you in his place. That man was promised the glory of heaven from Jesus' own mouth. It was his as a gift. No one could take it from him. Jesus made this promise to him, and that thief had absolute assurance that when he died, he would enter into heaven.

And yet, for the remainder of his life, his own cross stayed with him. He could not leave his cross. But this mattered not to him. For what mattered most was the cross upon which Jesus hung, because Jesus was dying on His cross for him. This thief truly had a theology of the cross. The road to Paradise, he clearly saw, was the road of the cross.

In your baptism you are just like this thief, for the same promise Jesus gave to him, He gives to you. The promise of eternal life in heaven. And no one, and nothing, can take it from you. You can have the same assurance that thief had. When you die, you will be in Paradise. And yet, for the rest of your life, your life is shaped by the cross. You know the glory of heaven that is coming. But now you endure whatever sufferings are laid upon you. Yet always with your eyes fixed on the cross of Jesus, believing His promise to you in your baptism.

Peter, James, and John were not there yet. Their eyes were not on the cross. But that would change. For in time, they would preach Christ Crucified, and they would die with their eyes fixed upon Jesus.

The glory of God and the beauty of heaven is not reason to be afraid for those whose sin is forgiven. And this is you. Every single day you live in the water of your baptism which washes your sins away, for that water (and by faith we know this to be true), is none other than the blood of Jesus.

He shed His blood for each and every one of you. There is no one here; there is no one watching this, or listening, or reading this, who is not forgiven. Jesus died on the cross for all of you. All of you are forgiven of your sin. Believing this makes you ready for heaven. Not just a glimpse of heaven as Peter, James, and John were given, but the fullness of heaven. Amen.