

Previews of Coming Attractions Luke 9:28-36

February 7, 2016

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

You used to see them only when you watched a movie in the theater. Now you see them when watch a movie on a DVD. I'm talking, of course, about what are now called simply "trailers" but used to be referred to as "previews of coming attractions" (a name which I like better). In these short clips, you get to see parts of a movie that has not yet been released (at least if you see it in a movie theater). Why do they make "previews of coming attractions"? They are not for the producer of the movie. He made the movie and already knows what's in it. They are not for actors and actresses in the movie. They were in the movie and already know what's in it. "Previews of coming attractions" are made for you and me, the movie consumer. They are made to give us a little taste of what's in the movie and make us eager (to the point of being impatient) to see the movie when it is released. This worked well in the recent movie, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. After the previews were shown, Star Wars fans were driven into a frenzy and absolutely could not wait to see this new installment of the Star Wars franchise.

The Transfiguration of our Lord is essentially a "previews of coming attractions" for life. To understand that, one must understand the context of this event which begin with the enigmatic introduction: "Now about eight days after these sayings..." What sayings?

Prior to our text, Peter had confessed Jesus to be the "Christ of God" in response to Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" Jesus accepted this as the correct answer. I'm sure the disciples were getting excited. The long awaited Messiah was here. Now good things would start to happen for them. The Messianic kingdom had arrived!

Before the disciples had a chance to contemplate their thrones and palaces in this kingdom, Jesus immediately predicts His own death. He says, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Their excitement changed to horror. This was not what they expected to happen to the Messiah. He

should kill His enemies and not be killed by them. How sad and devastating this would be for Jesus, they must have thought.

And before they had time to think this through, try to talk Jesus out of it, or consider whether it was safe for them to even go to Jerusalem with Jesus, Jesus told them what it would mean for them to follow Him: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

How confused and conflicted the disciples must have been. This is not what they had signed on for. They had expected a mighty Messiah, a colossal kingdom on earth, and wealth, honor, and prestige as followers of this Messiah. We sometimes criticize them for being so shallow and self-centered. But are we any different?

We, like Peter, have confessed Jesus to be Christ, our Savior, first at baptism and then at our confirmation. Don't we expect a Savior who brings with Him some sort of tangible success? We want someone who is powerful and strong whom we will feel proud to follow and who will reward us for being faithful.

If we are honest, many of us, like the disciples are not interested in hearing about a dying Savior. Not only does this conflict with our desire for a successful Savior, but it's too dull and depressing. People only want to hear positive and uplifting messages. Witness the decline in attendance at Wednesday Lent services and the usual good attendance at Easter services.

As far as Jesus' call to discipleship, are we any more eager to embrace it than the disciples were? Who among us wishes to deny themselves anything? We are more interested in our consumeristic society to indulge our every desire. Are we willing to take up the cross of suffering for Christ's sake or do we alter our words and our actions to avoid suffering for Jesus? For many, following Christ is something done only superficially so that it doesn't cost us anything or only when it is convenient and doesn't conflict with anything else in our busy schedules.

Besides, to accept Jesus for who He says He is; to accept His methodology of the cross as actually being successful; and to follow Him as He calls us to do – we would wonder: Is it all worth it? Let's be honest: it is difficult to live a life of faith and follow Jesus in this present evil age. It always has been but things seem to be getting worse and worse here and now. The future life which God has promised us seems so far off and so "iffy" since we have not seen it (like we've seen this age) and have no proof of the good coming (like we've seen the evil which is already here). Wouldn't it be nice to have a "preview of coming attractions" to stir up our interest and desire? That's exactly what we have in our Gospel reading on this special day.

When Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on the mountain, it was to do more than pray. It was to give a preview. On the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. His form changed. Our text says that His face was altered and His clothing became dazzling white. The other gospel accounts say, "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light;" (Matt.17:2) and "he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white." (Mark 9:2-3) This is some spectacular preview. But what is it a preview of and who is the preview for?

The preview is not for God the Father. He's the producer of this plan for salvation. He didn't need to see this preview since He designed the plan. This preview is not for Jesus. He's the Son of God and the star of this production of salvation. He didn't need to see this preview. This preview was for Peter, John, and James and, ultimately, for us. This plan of salvation is for us and we need to see this preview.

What is the plan? Our text says, "And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." The miraculous appearance of Moses and Elijah in glory seems to be for the very ordinary task of discussing Jesus' upcoming trip to Jerusalem. But it's more than that. The Greek word used here for *departure* is *exodus*, a very special word in salvation history.

In the Old Testament exodus, Moses led God's people out of slavery under the tyranny of Pharaoh through the waters of the Red Sea through the suffering in the desert to the joy and pleasure

of the Promised Land. By using this specific word, *exodus*, the Word of God is saying that a new exodus is about to begin. Jesus will lead God's people out of slavery to sin and tyranny to Satan through the waters of Holy Baptism through the suffering of this present age to the eternal joy and pleasure of the heavenly Promised Land.

Usually (especially on the eve of Lent) we think of this departure – this exodus – as only involving Jesus' suffering and death on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. This is a very important part of the journey. By His perfect sacrifice, Jesus has earned the forgiveness for all our sins. In receiving that forgiveness by faith, you are no longer separated from the God who created you, but are in a right and loving relationship with Him.

However, as important as this part of Jesus' journey is, it is still only a part. In Moses' exodus, he didn't save the people from slavery and Pharaoh and then stop in the wilderness. He continued on. In the same way, in Jesus' exodus, He didn't save us from our sin and Satan, our adversary, and then stop in the suffering. He continued on.

Jesus rose from the dead in victory. His resurrected body is perfect and glorified without weakness or limitation. Jesus ascended with that resurrected and glorified body to the right hand of God's glory in heaven. His resurrected and ascended body is what He gave a glimpse of on the mount of transfiguration. As I said before, He did not need to see that body, but we do. For this perfect resurrected and glorified body is a preview of what is in store for us. As Jesus was resurrected from the dead, so shall each of you and me be resurrected from the dead. As Jesus' body was transfigured, so shall each of you and me be transfigured. As Jesus' body was perfected and glorified, so shall your body and my body be perfected and glorified.

This is exciting to think about. In fact, it has already begun in each of us now. In your baptism, you were transfigured – changed – on the inside as God made you His child and began re-creating His image within you. You don't look any different to the rest of the world or feel any different in yourself because of this inward transfiguration, but you *are* different before God. You are His children, the heirs of His kingdom. And that will be revealed one day. As St. John says in his first

epistle, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2).

We shall be like Him, not only in holiness, but in glory, as well. We will have bodies that are like Jesus' glorious body, both in outward appearance and in inward substance. As the Word of God declares, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Philippians 3:20-21)

What confidence and hope this gives us as we live our lives in this evil world where everything is falling apart and being destroyed because of the effects of sin. Our bodies suffer the effects of sin, too. They suffer disease and injury. They grow old and become weak. They fall apart and die. Many people become discouraged and frightened because of this.

However, we have hope for the future no matter how bad the present is. Our weak and dying bodies shall be transfigured and transformed. And so we look forward to the future, rather than dreading. We have great joy instead of great sadness for we know how this movie plays out. As St. Paul sums it up for the Corinthians, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:51-57) And thanks be to God for today's preview of that coming attraction. Amen.