It is wonderful for us to be here

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6 August 2022

Monastic profession of Elia, GianMarco, and Mónica

Lk 9,28-36

28 Jesus took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. 29And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. 30And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: 31Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. 32But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. 33And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. 34While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. 35And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. 36And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

Dear brothers and sisters,
dear friends and guests,

Again this year we find ourselves before the mystery of the Lord's Transfiguration, which the liturgy invites us to enter so that, like the disciples enveloped by the luminous cloud, we may hear the Father's voice saying: "This is my Son, the Chosen One, listen to him!"

We are celebrating a mystery of light, light that shines on the Son's face and clothes, a sign of the glory that belongs to him from all eternity and that now appears for an instant, making itself visible to the disciples. Jesus knows this light, and it has been his force along the hard road of his existence.

This light has been faithful, although discreet, and Jesus has kept it within himself as a secret of the intimacy between him and the Father, while his life unfolded with events that were difficult to understand and to accept. Just before our passage, he had announced the hour of the cross, his own and of his disciples. And Luke specifies that the conversation that Jesus held with Moses and Elijah was again about his "passing, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem".

The very being of Jesus appears here in its complexity: eternal light, enclosed in a fragile body and in a complex and dramatic life story.

If we look more closely, we see that the entire scene described in this page is dominated by contrasting hues, which emerge on several levels, and in which we are invited to mirror also our own life stories, both personal and of the community. This is a page of lights and of clouds, of nearness and of distance, of lofty words like those of the Father and of senseless reactions like that of Peter.

Iconography that has tried to narrate visually this scene has likewise represented this contrast. In the upper register we see three men standing, encircles by light and glory, who are conversing among them. In the lower register there are again three men, but drowsy and disorientated, two with their heads down even, while the third, Peter, look upwards, but babbling words that are true and clumsy at the same time.

In the two insets, separated, but in tension, we may and should see mirrored our own fortunes and detect what we are called to.

In the first scene we observe a luminous Jesus, at peace and in prayer, as Luke notes. He is transfigured in his face — that is, in that part of the body with which over human being presents himself to another. The mystery of the face — this is the part that is most ours, which, however, it is not given to us to see, but only to show. We can only make a gift of our face, or else deny it… For this reason Jesus is transfigured in his face: the light that now appears is not for him to be complacent about — it is for the disciples, so that they may see and be consoled by it. Only the light that is given is authentic — that light that gladdens another.

And then the clothes… They too, Luke writes, became shining white. The light that emanates from the hidden being of Jesus, from his being one with the Father, is contagious and renders luminous everything with which it comes in contact. It is a light that irradiates and spreads throughout the cosmos, which is why the fathers could say that the transfiguration that is announced here infuses all humanity and the entire universe; it is not only a Christological, but also a cosmic event.

Next to Jesus, a part of the same scene, are Moses and Elijah, "who appeared in glory", who converse with him "about his passing, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem" — the Law and the Prophets, the Sacred Scripture of Israel,

which nourish Jesus' prayer and now illuminate his road towards Jerusalem.

Below, in a mirrored position, we see the other scene. Here too there are three men, but in a completely different attitude: not luminous, but rather "oppressed by sleep", who speak, not about passage, but rather about flight… Peter asks that time be stopped, that they remain there, in the blessed vision. In a position that mirrors the light of the first scene are the sleep and confusion of the second. In a position that mirrors the promise of transfiguration of the entire cosmos in light is the poverty of those who have difficulty in understanding. We are there… This is our world, disoriented and suffering, our affairs and our wounds, our personal ones and those of our community.

It might seem that there could not be any point of contact between the two scenes. Illusion is useless! The light is too sublime… the torpor is too persistent. The distance cannot be bridged! What sense is there then for us to continue to recall that light?

But from that torpor, from one who has just awakened and speaks insensate words, one word arises that is an opening, the word that Peter pronounces without knowing well what it may mean and where it might lead, but which he nevertheless senses to be true and irrepressible, a word that has the flavor of a confession of faith, not very different from the one he had pronounced not long before this: "You are the Christ of God". Peter says: "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here".

It is wonderful for us to be here… From this affirmation he deduces consequences that are absurd and out of place: "Let us make three shelters". Nevertheless, it is a true and decisive, and even more, an essential affirmation. Peter recognizes the splendor of that moment, in spite of being disoriented and afraid.

It is a precious word, which seems to provoke what follows, which places in relation the two scenes, the two registers, the two events. The high and the low are placed in a relationship: light and sleep, glory and bewilderment. The scene, in fact, continues with a cloud that descends and covers them with its shadow and with a voice that calls for attention.

Is it then possible that what is luminous can be mirrored in our affairs, which often have so much of shadow? It is possible because of that intuition, that taste, that perception that instinctively issues as a word, but is no less true for that, pronounced by Peter: "Master, it is wonderful for us", who is answered by a cloud that envelopes and a voice that indicates the way: to listen to the Son, who now again appears "alone", as Luke says at the end of this passage. And Peter does not say, "It's wonderful for me". He uses "us", he speaks in the name of those who at that moment are not in a condition to say it, but who allows himself to be involved in that story.

That courageous intuition seems to open up a passage for God, who does not use violence with us, but who desires us, who does not seduce us, but loves our liberty.

This is the perspective in which this evening we dare again to receive two brothers and one sister into an alliance with our community: Elia, GianMarco, and Monica. We have waited a long time for this profession, which was not possible because of the troubles and the confusion that our community has gone through, hance it was postponed. This is a profession that has the taste of a beginning — a beginning prepared and accompanied by those who in the preceding years bore the burden of faithfulness.

Dear Elia, GianMarco, and Monica — but also dear brothers and sisters who all together desire this evening to repeat to the Lord and to each other our alliance — we too feel somewhat like the three disoriented disciples. We too have experienced sleep, bitterness, suffering, absurdity — "We have passed through fire and through water".

We too have been with our heads down, like James and John in the Transfiguration icon. We have risked not being able to rise again, because the violence of the waves was beyond every human capacity to withstand them. And even today we feel in ourselves and we see in our brothers and sisters, here present or living elsewhere, wounds to treat, tears to dry, relations to which to give a new significance.

It seems absurd after such a storm to still have the courage to utter that "yes, I desire it" that in a few moments — so I believe — you will pronounce. It is absurd, of course! But for that very reason we feel more than ever that it is a gift, a great gift, which comes from the Lord.

We — you — participate in it only with our frailty — which is finally recognized, not only preached, but measured, sampled, in all its dramatic and devastating humiliation. but also in all its liberating fecundity. Indeed liberating, because we are free only when the scaffolding falls away and our frailty emerges, to the point of becoming light on our face and our clothing.

Like Peter, however, we also want to repeat, — and that is why we are still here — not without wonder, "Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here". There is in this the fragility of foolishness, but also the perception of a beauty that overcomes the billows, that does not allow itself to be destroyed by adverse events, that re-emerges in one's heart and on one's lips in spite of everything, which has been our strength at the time of trials. And I hope that it may return to be for all the reason for renewing one's own fidelity. May each one of us — not only Elia, GianMarco, and Monica — be able to repeat this evening: "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here", in spite of everything.

To sense a beauty at the heart of frailty, in the disorientation and fear that assail us not infrequently — this is our part. This is your part, your beginning, dear Elia, GianMarco, and Monica. Because this is indeed a beginning. With the vows you do not conclude a course, but begin a new life, a life in which it will be your care to preserve the memory of this beauty. If this memory remains alive in your heart, do not fear the waves and possible shipwrecks… Have no fear!

The Lord will know how to “profit” from your (our) profession of faith (Master, it is wonderful). He will know how to make the most of it… and will do the rest, as in the scene of the transfiguration, intervening with the cloud and the voice. The cloud of the Holy Spirit, in fact, will descend on your resolve, which renders that desire fruitful, and the Father’s voice will come to recall to you the road to carrying it out: to listen to the Son’s word!

This, dear Elia, GianMarco, and Monica, come between each one of you and the Lord, but at the heart of a community whose members in a few moments will welcome you with an embrace. There is a promise and a prayer in that embrace: a promise that tells you, “you are not alone”, a prayer of those who consign themselves also to you so as to be able to continue on their path. All are custodians of each other! And in this night we wish to remember all those who in over fifty years have contributed to the growth of this community — all, non one excluded, each one with his lights and his shadows, which only the Lord knows and judges, also those who by now are with the Father.

Your commitment occurs likewise in the entire Church, in the Churches of the East and of the West, in a moment of great tensions and conflicts, which we wish to recall and to bear above all this evening in our prayer.

Finally, we are living this moment and celebrating the Transfiguration of the Lord in a world torn by wars and by violence that we cannot but recall. We are in serious times on account of the many wars that bloody our earth, of the situation of injustice that degrade entire peoples, of the many silences with which we cover up tragedies of people in flight, men and women reduced to camps and other who dies ignored by all… and we could continue.

This world, however, does not recall to our memory only tragedies. If we are here it is also because of a good that sustains the world, including our little world, a good that we want to recognize tonight, so as to give thanks.

This feast is the occasion for us, sisters and brothers of Bose, to say with particular intensity our “thank you” to so many friends of ours who in these recent years have accompanied us with their friendship, with their prayer, with their suffering, and also with their discretion — you who are here and so many others who have been unable to be here.

In particular, we wish to thank the monks and nuns who as never before have given us signs of their friendship, especially the communities represented here tonight: Dumenza, Grandchamp, Arona, Amelia, Pra ‘dMill, Cellole– and all those communities that have manifested their presence in various ways. We wish to thank Archbishop Corrado Lorefice and Father Amedeo Cencini, and together with them the pastors of various Churches who have sent us a sign of their friendship.

We wish to thank the families and friends of the three professed. We wish to thank them because they have helped you, Elia, GianMarco, and Monica, to be here tonight. They have done this as they were able… May the Lord, who knows the heart of each person, bring to completion what we are able only to begin.

brother Sabino