

Homily by Archbishop Elpidophoros of America On the Feast of the Transfiguration



Dear sisters and brothers in the Lord,

I am delighted to join you today on your parish's feast – the Metamorphosis of the Savior in the presence of the Prophets Moses and Elias, and before the eyes of Peter, Iakovos and John. Your parish has gone through a metamorphosis itself, as you have rebuilt your church following the terrible and unfortunate fire from six years ago. We re-opened this beautiful church almost two years ago, and you have come back stronger. And for this, we all give thanks to God.

There is something about this feast, and its place in the midst of the Dormition Fast, that is as redolent with meaning, as the time of year is with the first-fruits of summer.

This is the only time in the Lord's earthly ministry that we behold Him as He truly is – glorious and adorned with all manner of light, and even lightning! The Evangelists struggle to give an adequate description of His appearance on Mount Tabor, because it was so dazzling that words and metaphors fell short. The Disciples stood in utter amazement as the transformation happened before their very eyes.

They beheld the Lord of Glory in all His glory! And yet, my friends, we give the title, The King of Glory, ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῆς Δόξης, to the Lord on the Cross, in place of the placard that Pontius Pilate wrote: Jesus the Nazarene: The King of the Jews.*

By doing this, the Church fulfills one of the greatest prophecies of the Psalms, that speaks of the Harrowing of Hades – Christ's descent into Hell – and His demolishing of Sin, Death and Hell. This icon is immortalized in the Church of Chora in Constantinople, and it is used in every icon that portrays the Resurrection. The Psalm says:

Lift up your gates, O princes; and be lifted up, everlasting doors;

And the King of glory shall come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in war.

Lift up your gates, O princes; and be lifted up, everlasting doors;

And the King of glory shall come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.†

Yes, my beloved Christians, on Mount Tabor, the Lord revealed His true form, His glorious form. In the presence of Moses and Elias, speaking with them about His coming Passion and Death. So why is it glorious?

Because it is through the Passion, the Cross, and ultimate Death and Burial that we arrive at the Resurrection.

This is the "Exodus" that the Lord spoke of with the Prophets on Mount Tabor. This is where suffering always leads, if we believe. And this is what His Disciples could not understand at that moment.

But for us, who celebrate the Transfiguration this Sunday, we can see clearly that the Cross is the very glory of God, for it was ascended by the Lord out of His unconditional love for every human being – past, present and future. And we can share in that glory by our willingness to love unconditionally all those whom God brings into our lives. It is not easy to do so. Just as it was not easy for the Lord to accept the pain and suffering of His execution at the hands of cruel men. But He endured and was glorified beyond any human comprehension.

May we always be aware of the grace that has been given to us to follow Him. To follow Him to Mount Tabor. And to follow Him to Golgotha. Where we learn from Him how to give of ourselves for the sake of others. Where we learn what it is to love others as God loves them. Where we learn what it is to carry our own crosses, and discover the glory that never fades away.

May today's triumphant Feast of the Lord's Transfiguration always bless you with this love, and bring the glory and light that shone upon the Holy Mountain Tabor into the life of the world and all who live it.

Amen.

* John 19:19.

† Psalm 24:7-10; translated from the LXX, 23:7-10.

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