

There is a famous painting, by the artist Raphael, which I am sure that all of you would recognize. The top half of the painting depicts the Transfiguration, which took place on what Scripture refers to as “the high mountain”. Raphael has Jesus floating in the air just above the mountain top. Elijah and Moses are on either side of Jesus, engaged in conversation with Him. Peter, James and John are there, but are so overwhelmed that they appear to be fainting, and have fallen to the ground. The bottom half of the painting is at the foot of the mountain. On one side, there is a crowd of people, and among them, the disciples arguing with the Scribes. On the other side, there is a young boy having a seizure, and his father holding on to him. This is the boy in today’s Gospel reading who was possessed by a mute spirit.

These two events, the Transfiguration on the high mountain, and the situation that was unfolding below with the

young boy, were happening at the same time. And they are closely related to Moses on Mount Horeb and the people below Mount Horeb who had lost their faith in God.

On Mount Horeb, Moses spoke with God. He asked God for His name. That is, he dared to ask Him, “Who are you?”. God mysteriously replies, “I am who I am”. This is not actually a name, but a Hebrew idiom. It is not unlike the idiom that we sometimes use in English. When we don’t have an explanation for something, or when we are unable to comprehend something, we say, “It is what it is”. God, in Himself, is incomprehensible to us. He simply *is who He is*. Moses also asked to see God’s face, to which God answered, “No man may see the face of God and live” (Ex 33:20). Thus did Moses speak to God on a high mountain.

At the Transfiguration, we see Moses speaking to God once again, on a high mountain, but not as to a voice coming

from a burning bush, as on Mount Horeb. At the Transfiguration, the name of God, that is, *who He is*, is revealed to Moses in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush on Mount Horeb. Thus, on the high mountain, Moses now looks upon the face of God and lives.

On Mount Horeb, it was Moses who descended from the high mountain to the people below. But this time, it is not Moses who comes down from the mountain, to bring God's commandments to His people, but God Himself come down. Jesus does not bring with Him the tablets of the law because He, Himself, is the law. He does not come to bring the Word of God to the people, like Moses or one of the prophets, because He, Himself, is the Word of God, in the flesh. But *like* Moses, Jesus comes down from the high mountain to find an unbelieving people below.

At the time of Moses, God became frustrated with the people's unbelief, and He complains about them. He says to Moses:

How long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? (Nu 14:11).

In like manner, Jesus descends from the high mountain only to be met with the same sort of frustration. And so, He complains to them:

What an unbelieving lot you are! How long must I remain with you? How long can I endure you?

God's complaint to Moses about the people's unbelief, however, did not mean that He was abandoning them. And so here, despite Jesus' complaint and frustration with the people, the Scribes, *and* His disciples, He does not abandon them. Although our Lord complained about their lack of faith, He, nevertheless, says, "Bring the boy to me." We can begin see here, that our Lord complains about our unbelief, not out of

condemnation, but out of mercy. He wants to wake us up, to stir up our faith in Him.

So, the boy's father brings his son to Jesus, but due to his lack of faith, he says to our Lord, "...*if* you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." Look at this from our Lord's point of view. He is infinite God, incarnate. He is the creator of the universe and sustains all that exists. And this man says to Him, "*If* you can do anything"? Jesus has already identified the crowd as a "unbelieving lot", and has questioned aloud just how much longer He could endure them. Now the boy's father is questioning Jesus—if He can do anything. Our Lord must have been stunned and greatly disappointed by this. He simply repeats what the man said, "If you can!" None of us were there, of course, to hear just how our Lord said this. Perhaps it was with a sad sigh, or maybe there was a sound of

frustration in His voice. In any case, the boy's father seems to have gotten the message. Scripture says:

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24).

Some ancient sources of the NT add the words "with tears" the father cried out. The boy's father does not cry out to the Lord to deliver his son, but to help His unbelief. In response, Jesus delivers the boy from satan, and heals him of his seizures. And when the boy apparently dies from the demon's final attack, our Lord raises him up with the mere touch of His hand.

What took place at the foot of the high mountain, then, is not so much about the healing of the young boy and the casting out of a demon. It is, instead, about faith in God, in our Divine Savior. He is looking to inspire faith in us, that we

would personally entrust ourselves to Him. He wants us to cry out to Him, like the boy's father, "Help my unbelief"!

Isn't our Divine Savior worthy of putting our trust in Him? Is He not worthy enough for us to give ourselves to Him whole and entire? Indeed, He is infinitely worthy, and we do Him a great injustice by not putting our faith in Him. In Luke's Gospel, our Lord laments this sad state of affairs, saying, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?"

Jesus wants to visit each and every one of us. He has come down the high mountain for us; He stoops down from His Divine Glory to save us. Will He find faith on earth? Will He find in you a heart that is entrusted to Him? Do you find yourself weak in faith, like the boy's father, unable to put your trust in the Lord Jesus? Then make an act of faith as this man did. Say to Jesus, "I believe, Lord! Help my unbelief!"

It is by the grace of God alone that any of us have faith. Our turning to the Lord is always a response to Him; He *first* calls us. As our Lord says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you..." (John 15:16). So also, is our love for Him always a response to God's love for us. He always takes the initiative, giving us first the grace to believe in Him and to love Him. As it says in the first epistle of John, "We love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Make no mistake about it; apart from Him, we can do nothing.

I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

In our Lord Jesus, the Divine Glory that was revealed to Elijah and Moses, has come down to earth, that we, through faith, might ascend to heavenly glory. Thus, as St. Paul teaches us, we must:

Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that

are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1–4).

*O Lord, I believe! Please help my unbelief!*



*The Transfiguration, 1520* is a painting by Raphael which was uploaded on December 19th, 2019.