

AUGUST VI.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD.

Matt. xviii; Mark ix; Luke ix.

OUR Divine Redeemer, in order to show us that the sufferings of his servants are usually intermingled with frequent spiritual comforts, and to give us a sensible demonstration of the truth of his promises of an eternal glory reserved for us in the world to come, was pleased to manifest a glimpse of his majesty in the mystery of his Transfiguration. Being in Galilee, about a year before his sacred passion, he chose to be witnesses of his glory the same three beloved disciples who were afterwards to be witnesses of his bloody agony in the garden—namely, St. Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, SS. James and John. He took three, that their evidence might be unexceptionable; but he would not publicly discover his glory, to teach his followers to love the closest secrecy in all spiritual graces and favours. All pretences contrary to this rule are suggested by blind self-love, not by the spirit of God; they are a disguised pride, and a dangerous illusion. Every true servant of God loves to be hidden and concealed; his motto in the divine gifts, even when he most ardently invites all creatures to magnify the Lord with him for all His unspeakable mercies, is: *My secret to myself, my secret to myself.*(1) He fears lest he should be at all considered or thought of in what purely belongs to God alone. Jesus therefore would exhibit this miracle in retirement, and he led these three apostles to a retired mountain, as he was accustomed to repair often to some close solitude to pray. The tradition of the Christians in Palestine, of which St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. John Damascen, and other ancient fathers are vouchers, assures us, that this was mount Thabor, which is exceeding high and beautiful, and was anciently covered with green trees and shrubs, and was very fruitful. It rises something like a sugar loaf, in a vast plain, in the middle of Galilee. This was the place in which the Man-God appeared in his glory. He was transfigured whilst at prayer, because it

(1) Isa. xxiv 16

Is usually in this heavenly commerce that the soul receives the dew of divine consolations, and tastes how infinitely sweet and good God is to those who sincerely seek him. Many Christians indeed are strangers to this effect of that holy exercise, because they do not apply themselves to it with assiduity and fervour, or neglect to disengage their affections from creatures by perfect humility, self-denial, and mortification of the senses. Without a great purity of heart no man shall see God. A little birdlime entangles the feathers of a bird, and holds down the strongest pinion from being able to raise the body in the air. So the least earthly dust clogs the wings of the soul, the least inordinate attachment to creatures is a weight which hinders the perfect union of her affections with God, and the full flow of his graces upon her; but a Christian worthily disposed and fitted by the Holy Ghost to receive the spirit of prayer, by assiduity in that holy exercise purifies his love more and more, transforms his affections, and renders them more and more spiritual and heavenly. Of this, the Transfiguration of our Divine Redeemer was, among other transcending prerogatives, a most noble and supereminent prototype.

Whilst Jesus prayed he suffered that glory which was always due to his sacred humility, and of which for our sake he deprived it, to diffuse a ray over his whole body. His face was altered, and shone as the sun, and his garments became white as snow. By this glorious transfiguration of his flesh he has animated our hope, that even our bodies will share with our immortal souls in the bliss which he has promised us, and will inherit his glory. Do we often bear in mind this comfortable truth? Can we believe it, and not always be employed in the thoughts of it? Can we think of it, and not be ravished out of ourselves with holy joy? Yes; this heavy lumpish flesh, these infirm corruptible bodies, at present so often subject to sickness, pain, and wants, will one day be raised from the dust, glorified, impassable; no more liable to heat, cold, diseases, torment, or tears; beautiful, transcending in lustre and brightness the sun and stars; endued with swiftness beyond that of light, and with strength equal to the angels; with the power of penetrating all bodies, as Christ did the stone of the sepulchre, and the doors when shut; with dazzling glory, with

unspeakable pleasure in every part or organ; in a word, with all the communicable gifts and qualities of spirits, resembling the body of Christ glorified after his resurrection, which, as St. Paul tells us, is the model upon which ours shall be raised in glory. A glimpse of all this appeared in the splendour wherewith his adorable humanity was clothed in his Transfiguration.

Moses and Elias were seen by the three apostles in his company on this occasion, and were heard discoursing with him of the death which he was to suffer in Jerusalem. Moses represented the ancient patriarchs, and the first saints who lived under the law; Elias the later prophets; and they showed by their presence that all the just inspired by God from the beginning had given testimony to Christ as the true Messias. They had both been remarkable for their sufferings in the cause of virtue, Elias having been exceedingly persecuted by the wicked, and Moses having chosen rather to be afflicted with the people of God than to enjoy the greatest honours and pleasures of Pharaoh's court; and the cross being the constant object of the most ardent desires of our blessed Redeemer out of the excess of his love for us, they spoke to him of nothing but of the stripes, thorns, reproaches, and cruel death which he was to suffer. Our loving Saviour, in part to moderate his ardour to complete his sacrifice by the triumph of his love in his death on the cross, had made it frequently the subject of his conversation with his disciples, and even in this joyful mystery, would entertain himself and the witnesses of his glory upon it. If we truly consider and understand the spiritual fruits and glory of mortification and suffering for Christ, we shall rejoice in wearing the livery of our crucified Redeemer. The three apostles were wonderfully delighted with this glorious vision, and St. Peter cried out to Christ: *Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tents; one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.* This he spoke, not knowing what he said, being out of himself in a transport of holy admiration and joy; desiring never to be drawn from the sight of so glorious an object, and never to lose that sweetness and delight with which his soul was then overwhelmed. He truly knew not what he said, or he would never have desired that for the time of trial

on earth which is reserved only for heaven. Neither would he have contented himself with beholding only the glorified humanity of Christ, which vision can bear no proportion to the beatific contemplation of the divinity itself. He tasted only a single drop of that overflowing river which inebriates the heavenly Jerusalem, and all its blessed inhabitants; yet was so much transported by it. What would he then have said if he had received into his soul the whole impetuous torrent of heavenly delights? He who has once tasted that spiritual sweetness which God sometimes bestows on souls in this life to strengthen their weakness, and to attract them to his love by the sweet odour of his ointments, must ever after live in bitterness, alleviated only by resignation and love, till he arrive at the fountain itself, which is God. No wonder therefore that St. Peter, after this foretaste was unwilling to return again to the earth. How little do the lovers of the world know the incomparable sweetness of divine love, or they would despise from their hearts those toys for which they deprive themselves of so great a good! Yet so depraved is the taste of many by their passions, that they would be content, were it possible, always to live here, and never think of the joys of heaven. "How can it be good for us to be here," cries out St. Bernard,(1) "where everything in worldly pursuits is tedious, empty, or dangerous? Here is much malice, and very little wisdom, if even a little. Here all things are slippery and treacherous, covered with darkness, and full of snares, where souls are exposed to continual danger of perishing, the spirit sinks under affliction, and nothing is found but vanity and trouble of mind." To the just this life is the time of trials and labour; heaven is our place of rest, our eternal sabbath, where our patience and tears will find their reward exceeding great. Why do we seek repose before the end of our warfare?

Whilst St. Peter was speaking, there came, on a sudden, a bright shining cloud from heaven, an emblem of the presence of God's majesty, and from out of this cloud was heard a voice which said: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.* By this testimony the Father declared Christ his only begotten and co-eternal Son, sent by him into

(1) S. Bern. Sermon 6 in Ascens.

the world to be the remedy of our sins, our **advocate** and our propitiation, through whom alone we can find access to his offended majesty. If through him we approach the throne of his mercy, we cannot be rejected, he being in his humanity the object of the infinite complacency of the Father; through him we are invited to apply with confidence for mercy and every good gift. By the same voice the Father also declared him the perfect model of our virtues, and commands us to hear him, and attend to his example, in order to square by it our lives, and to form in our souls a new spirit grounded upon the pattern he hath set us of humility, meekness, charity, and patience. He commands us also to listen with the utmost respect and docility to his saving and most holy doctrine, which is the word of eternal life. The apostles who were present, upon hearing this voice, were seized with a sudden fear and fell upon the ground; but Jesus, going to them, touched them, and bade them to rise. They immediately did so, and saw no one but Jesus standing in his ordinary state. This vision happened in the night. As they went down the mountain early the next morning, Jesus gave them a charge not to discover to any one what they had seen till he should be risen from the dead. The Jews were unworthy to hear what many among them would have only blasphemed, and they had sufficient evidence by his miracles, to which they wilfully shut their eyes; but Jesus would by this give us a fresh lesson of humility, and teach us that secrecy with regard to divine graces, and the exercise of all extraordinary virtues, is the guardian of those gifts.

From the contemplation of this glorious mystery we ought to conceive a true idea of future happiness; if this once possess our souls, it will make us not to value any difficulties or labours we can meet with here, but to regard with great indifference all the goods and evils of this life, provided we can but secure our portion in the kingdom of God's glory. **Thabor** is our encouragement by setting that bliss before our eyes; but **Calvary** is the way that leads to it. When Christ shall let us into the secrets of his love and cross, and make us taste that interior sweetness and secure peace which he hath hidden therein, and which the world knoweth not, then we shall find a comfort and joy in our sufferings themselves. and with St. Paul we shall

think of nothing but of loving, and suffering in what manner it shall please God to make us tread in the footsteps of his divine Son, being solicitous only to walk in the continual exercise of pure love. The ninety-fourth sermon of St. Leo, which is on this mystery, shows this festival to have been observed at Rome in the middle of the fifth century. Pope Calixtus III. made it more universal and solemn by a bull, dated in 1457.

ST. XYSTUS, OR SIXTUS II., POPE AND MARTYR.

HE was a Grecian by birth, deacon of the Roman Church under St. Stephen, and upon his demise, in 257 was chosen pope, being the twenty-fifth from St. Peter. St. Dionysius of Alexandria consulted him by three letters on certain difficulties, and recommended to him to bear a little while with the Africans and some among the Asiatics with regard to their error concerning the validity of baptism given by heretics. Accordingly this pope used towards them indulgence, contenting himself with strongly recommending the truth to them; and his successors pursued the same conduct till that error was condemned in the plenary council often mentioned by St. Austin.* St. Sixtus is styled by St. Cyprian a peaceable and excellent prelate. Though some have ascribed eight years to his pontificate, it is certain from all the circumstances of his history, that he only sat one year.(1)

Gallus, the successor of Decius in the empire, and a persecutor of the Christians, being despised for his cowardice, was slain with his son and colleague Volusius in 253, after having reigned eighteen months. Æmilius then assumed the title of emperor; but was killed after he had reigned four months without having been acknowledged by the senate; and Valerianus, a person of a noble family, and great reputation, who had been censor and chief of the senate, was acknowledged em-

(1) See Berti, Diss. l. in Sæc. 3, p. 172.

* By this plenary council, Launoy, Sirmond, and Albaspinæus understand the council of Arles, assembled out of all the West in 314; but Bellarmin, Natalis Alexander, &c. explain it more probably of the council of Nice, because St. Austin calls it a plenary council of the whole world.