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## ***From Tabor to Calvary: "Did God abandon Jesus?"***

***by Marcellino D'Ambrosio***



*This examination of the relationship between the Transfiguration and the Passion of Christ, between Mount Tabor and Calvary, makes for helpful reading either during the season of Lent or for the Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6.*



Appearances can be deceiving. After all, Jesus was just another Galilean. His hands were the rough hands of a workman. People in Nazareth knew his mother. Some even remembered the man they believed was his dad.

Yet when Jesus went up on Mt. Tabor with his three closest disciples, his appearance changed. The glory of his divinity suddenly became visible, shining through humanity, dazzling his overwhelmed disciples.

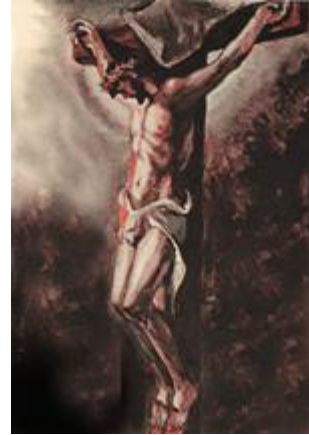
But then two others show up--Moses and Elijah. Of all the great figures of the Old Testament, why them? The Jews were not abstract thinkers, but rather very concrete. When they thought about the first five books of the Bible, "the Law," or "Torah," they thought of a person – Moses. When they thought about the numerous books of the bible by or about the prophets, the greatest prophet came to mind, Elijah. The Law and the Prophets. That was the Jewish way of saying "the Bible." Moses and Elijah witness to Jesus because all of Scripture witness to him.

But what do the three of them talk about? His miracles? His teaching? Neither. They spoke about his "departure" soon to be accomplished in Jerusalem. This is what is predicted and described in a mysterious way all throughout the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, namely his march straight through indescribable suffering and death on his way to resurrected glory.

One thing that has troubled many people about his passion are his words from the cross "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matt 27:46). Some have even read into this a mistaken theology that Jesus, taking our place, experienced the most terrible

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consequence of our sin, namely being cut off from communion from the Father, separated from God and his grace. Not a chance. That fact that Jesus bore our sin does not and cannot mean this. He is not a sinner. His communion with the Father and the Spirit can never be interrupted. The Father and the Spirit are with Him on Mt. Tabor (the cloud overshadowing the disciples there was the same cloud of the Spirit that overshadowed Mary at the annunciation). The Father and the Spirit are with Him on Golgotha.



So how do we take Jesus' words? They are a quote from a psalm. In fact the ancient Jewish practice was to designate a particular psalm not by a number but by its first few words (we still do this with conciliar and papal documents such as "Lumen Gentium"). There is a psalm in fact that begins with this phrase, Ps 22. Make this psalm part of your meditation on the passion this Lent. In a remarkable way it predicts the mockery that is hurled upon Christ that fateful day, the piercing of his hands and feet by a pack of "dogs" (a very uncomplimentary term in those days for gentiles), the gambling for his clothing, even his eventual deliverance by the God who hears his cry. So Jesus, from the cross, is proclaiming what is manifest in the transfiguration: "all the law and the prophets witness to me and to what is happening right now."



This is why Jesus came. This is why for ten chapters in Luke's gospel, Jesus is resolutely making his way towards Jerusalem (Lk 9-19). His teaching and his miracles are remarkable. But if he had not laid down his life for us, if he had not been raised from the dead, we'd still be in our sins. The entire drama of human history finds its center and its meaning in these few tumultuous days.

Some have asked why Mel Gibson's movie was about Jesus' passion only, and not the entire life of Christ. This is the reason. Theologically, the page dividing the New and Old Testaments is not the gold one between Malachi and Matthew, but rather the crimson page of the passion.

And if you've see this movie, this tribute of a Catholic film maker to his Lord, you will see why Peter, James, and John needed the glory of Tabor before enduring the horror of Golgotha.

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Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio, host of EWTN's Early Church Fathers TV series, continues to acquaint us with the colorful personalities of the earliest Christian teachers, making their dynamic message accessible, enjoyable, and relevant to the challenges of everyday life. This, the second volume of series, consists of shows produced in 2006 and covering fascinating personalities such as the courageous St. John Chrysostom, the outspoken bible scholar, Jerome, and 17 other heroes of the Early Church.



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