

Many people are disappointed when they visit places like Seattle and San Francisco for only a few days. They come to see the majesty of Mt. Rainier or the girders of the Golden Gate Bridge, only to find them shrouded from sight, barely visible, if at all, through the swirling mist. As Peter, James, and John hiked up the mount that day - they surely had no idea of what awaited them on the summit. Certainly, weather permitting, a spectacular view, perhaps. But more importantly, what truly awaited those disciples was a *glimpse of glory* through the mists of time and eternity. And as *we* look to catch a glimpse of glory here this morning, please join me in prayer...

Dear Christian friends,

Fifteen hundred years ago, the emperor of Rome built a tomb for his beloved sister - a small building designed in the shape of a Greek cross capped by a vaulted ceiling covered with mosaics of swirling stars in an indigo sky. With an over-arching theme of the victory of life over death, the focal point of the mosaic ceiling is a depiction of Jesus as the Good Shepherd surrounded by his sheep in a paradise of green. The mausoleum of Galla Placidia still stands today in Ravenna, Italy, and has been called by scholars "*the earliest and best preserved of all mosaic monuments*" and one of the "*most artistically perfect.*"

But visitors who have admired the mosaic in travel books and on postcards will be disappointed when they enter the mausoleum. The structure has only a handful of tiny windows covered in thin sheets of luminous stone, and what light does enter, is usually blocked by a mass of tourists. The "*most artistically perfect*" mosaic monument, the inspiring vision of the Good Shepherd in a starry paradise, is hidden behind a veil of darkness.

Doesn't life sometimes feel like that, like you know there is something better, something greater, if only you could just catch the right angle or the right light and

actually see it? I mean, we live in a dark world. Our hearts long for goodness, beauty, justice, peace, and yes, forgiveness...but they are so often hidden from sight. The mists of evil and sin cloud our sight and judgment and we are unable to see what our hearts long to see, to know firsthand what others have known. We long to catch just a glimpse of glory.

Moses saw it from a craggy cleft on Mt. Sinai. Elijah saw it as he was whisked away in a chariot of fire. Even the tiresome threesome of Peter, James, and John became the blithesome threesome as they beheld their Christ transfigured in glory before them, engaged in mystical conversation with Moses and Elijah. And we long to see it, too - the awesome, frightening, un-safe-for-sinful-humans - glory of God. The Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, has instilled in us this insatiable thirst in our hearts to experience that glory, because the glory of God is all that can ever truly make us eternally happy.

But isn't this why Jesus has come? Over these last weeks we have heard again and again how the Messiah was to come as *a light shining in the darkness* to bring the glorious glow of righteousness to those languishing in the shadows of sin and death. To you and to me and to the ages the Messiah was to come for the salvation of everyone who believes. And hasn't he come? Standing there with Moses and Elijah, standing there before the cowering disciple, proclaimed in Word and Sacrament before us this day and everyday, it is this Jesus that has come to bring us from our time of grace to eternal glory in heaven.

John the Baptizer identified this *Jesus* as ***The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*** (John 1:29) - *the one Anointed with the Holy Spirit and power at his Baptism*. Andrew boldly told the same Peter who would later climb the Mount of Transfiguration of this *Jesus*, ***We have found the Messiah (that is the Christ)*** (John 1:41) and didn't Peter agree, calling himself in our lesson for today ***an eyewitness of [this] Lord Jesus Christ***. (2 Peter 1:16) God the Father himself spoke his approval of this *Jesus* both at the baptism and the

transfiguration: ***This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!***

And so this *Jesus*, transfigured in glory, identified as the ***Light of the World, the Savior of nations, the Lamb of God, the Word made flesh, the Christ, the Son of God***, this *Jesus* would descend the summit of the mount of transfiguration to ascend the summit of the mount of suffering called Calvary, bearing more than a wooden cross, bearing yours, mine, yes the sins of the entire world. He would not leave that mount alive, but would give his life for yours and mine to pay the debt of sin that we owed and to make us right with God. It is this *Jesus* who then rose from the dead to guarantee our own triumphant resurrection from the grave not to catch merely a *glimpse* of glory, but to fully and permanently experience the complete glory of eternal life. And all of it ***freely given in the One [the Father] loves.***

This is what awaits us believers on the far side of the grave. But here we are, our vision still obscured by the mists of sin and death. In the tomb of Galla Placida, the rank odors of the grave, the overly-perfumed, and the sweaty tourists mix to leave the sense of smell offended by its surroundings, the eyes longing to see the glory that is known to exist through the darkness. The impatient quickly leave or even decide not to enter any further into the depths of the tomb. But for the patient - as what amounts to about a quarter is US dollars and cents is dropped in the machine - there is heard a gentle "click". With no advanced warning, spotlights near the ceiling shatter the darkness, illuminating the iridescent tiles of the mosaic. Suddenly the dull, hot darkness overhead becomes a starry sky, a dark-blue cupola with huge, shimmering stars that seem startlingly close. 'Ahhhhh!' comes the sound from the gapers below...but only for a few seconds. For then *click* the light goes out, and again there's darkness, darker perhaps even than before."

Of course, the "coins continue to clink in the chest" and the bright burst of illumination is repeated over and over again. Each time the lights come on, the visitors are given another glimpse of heaven, their

eye captures another beautiful picture of the gospel—deer drinking from springs - Ps. 42, garlands of fruit and leaves - John 15, Jesus gently reaching out to his sheep who look lovingly on their Good Shepherd - John 10. After witnessing it, one visitor wrote: "*I have never seen anything so sublime in my life!*"

Peter wrote of the importance of such glorious proclamations of the Gospel for us who long for a glimpse of glory, ***And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*** (2 Peter 1:19) For whenever the Word of the Lord is proclaimed, it is like a bright burst of light. In those brief moments, the shadows recede and we are given a glimpse of a world beyond the darkness - a sublime vision that reorders our perception of reality and leaves us hungry for more.

But here's thing about catching a glimpse of glory. You have to actually be wanting to see something. Sure, Wikipedia can provide you with all the prose and visuals you want for such things as golden bridges, soaring mountains, and Roman mausoleums. But what of actually being there? What of driving through the arches, scaling the summit, dropping the lira in the light-show. What of putting the Voice of God - his Word - into practice in your life?

The resultant darkness of apathy to the Word is determined: ***everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*** (Matthew 7:26) No, the glimpse of glory that does not fade comes with a life of freedom that is lived in line with the will of God. James wrote: ***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*** ²³ ***Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror*** ²⁴ ***and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*** ²⁵ ***But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--***

he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

I suppose that could have been the case with the disciples. After all, once they caught a glimpse of glory, they weren't thinking about taking a second glance to make sure of what they saw. They were covering their faces in fear and shame. Peter was so busy guarding his face he forgot to guard his tongue and began throwing out ideas to turn the mount into some sort of carnival freak show! Peter meant well, of course. Mark tells us that Peter...didn't know what else to say. He just didn't want the glory to fade or disappear. He didn't want the lights to go out.

But as the Word of the Lord says, "Fear not. I bring you Good News of Great Joy." This *Jesus* is ***our glorious hope, our glorious joy, our glorious crown in whom we will glory now and in the eternity to come when he comes again to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed.*** (2

Thessalonians 1:9,10) To the praise of God's glorious grace, you have believed the glimpses of glory you have seen through the Word - the Word made flesh, the Word transfigured, the Word proclaimed to the joy and edifying of you, Christ's holy people.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:16,17)

Yes, what a glimpse of glory! There is nothing else like it, the glory of the Lord - not a mausoleum in Ravenna, not a bridge standing tall over a sparkling bay, not a mountain gleaming in the sun, can do what the Son, in whom the Father is well-pleased, can do for you. Catch *your* glimpses of glory each and every time you delve into the *Word* of the Lord and know through this *Jesus*, you too will one day enter into the eternal *glory* of the Lord. God grant it. Amen.