

Climbing up Mount Tabor is no joke. Yes, the Mount of Beatitudes is more like a hill, but Mount Tabor is a legit mountain. We had to take a taxi up the narrow winding roads up the mountain and it took us 10 to 15 minutes—a hike which I think would have taken Jesus and the disciples three to four hours to walk albeit with sandals! Once you get to the top, there is a beautiful Church which has two symbolic side chapels: one dedicated to Moses and the other to Elijah. What is also interesting about the design of this Church is that there is a magnificent mosaic of Christ made of gold in the top center of the Church. Around the feast of Transfiguration in August, the Church is designed so that when the light shines through the Church, it illuminates the face of Christ allowing it to shine with all its brilliance.

I think the architect was onto something. By highlighting the face of Christ, what is the significance of the face of Christ?

In the Gospel today we hear of how Jesus' clothes were dazzling white and St. Mark emphasizes that it wasn't because of the bleach in his laundry! But it also says that he was transfigured before him, and in Matthew we hear that his face 'shone like the sun'.

The key to understanding the significance of the face of Christ however is Moses and Elijah. Why are Moses and Elijah there? Why not Abraham and David or Jeremiah and Isaiah? A lot of commentators will say that they are there because Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. This is true, but if we look closer into their stories we will find that there is another significant reason.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is at the cave in Mount Carmel waiting for the presence of God, and when he hears the presence of God in the still small voice, what does he do? He covers his face with a mantle (1 King 19:13). Why did he do that? He did that because he was probably following the story of Moses. When Moses was speaking to God, he longed to see the glory of God, the face of God. However, God said no man can see my face and live. God makes a compromise and allows Moses to experience the presence of God, but he says this: "while my glory passes by...you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen".

Both prophets longed to see the face of God but it was hidden and veiled from their eyes. However, it would be more aptly said that in fact, it was God who was longing to reveal his face, but he was preparing his people to see his face *revealed in Christ*. This is the significance of the face of Christ: it is the face whom the prophets have waited centuries to see! And now the apostles who still don't fully understand who Jesus is get a glimpse into his identity, a glimpse into his divine nature and the glory to be revealed in us.

Yet Jesus does not just reveal something about himself; he reveals something about us. He reveals that the light of his glory to be revealed in us will come through two things: 1) suffering Lk 24: 26 (Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?) and 2) the contemplation of his face 2 Cor 3:18 (And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another).

Suffering and contemplation. The two are interwoven because by contemplating his face in prayer we begin to see his face unveiled in our suffering and the sufferings of others so that by embracing the glorious face of Christ in contemplation and in suffering we become changed into his likeness; we become saints.

That is why we celebrate the memorial of St. Polycarp today who would not deny Jesus Christ. He would not deny his Lord whose face he contemplated everyday such that even when they threatened to burn him at the stake he embraced his suffering and said: why do you delay? Come, do what you will.

Today, let us be reminded of our call to holiness that the light which shines forth from the face of Christ should also shine from ours as St. John Paul writes: holiness is the living reflection of the face of Christ.