

**“Listen to Him! Take your cross!” Mat 17:1-9**

**“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. <sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.””**

Today we have this wonderful event described by Matthew. The transfiguration of Jesus. Not everyone has been that lucky as to experience something like this, to see the glory of God and the saints of old in new glorified bodies. But all children of God are heading towards this experience. This is what our Lord has promised to us. This is our ultimate hope, new heaven and new earth, filled with the glory of God’s own Son.

Peter and James and John, they were given this incredible opportunity, to taste at least a glimpse of this heavenly glory. Similar experiences during their life time were given to Moses, as we just read in our OT reading, and also to Elijah. We can also learn more about our ultimate hope from testimonies of apostles.

This is how apostle Paul speaks about it: “We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (1Co 15:51-53)

This is how apostle John speaks about it: “ Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (1Jo 3:2)

This is how Book of Revelation depicts what awaits you. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... (Rev 21:1-2) And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Rev 21:23)

Who wouldn’t want to experience it all? To inherit this life in the presence of holy God. Life where all tears are wiped away, where there is no more brokenness, no more injustice, no more death, nor mourning, nor crying, nor pain.” (Rev 21:4) Where your life and entire creation is restored in its goodness. The fullness of joy and happiness!

But ... we are still here, and there are things which we should learn from today’s reading. So let’s take a closer look at what Matthew is telling us.

Matthew does not explain ‘why’, he just tells us that Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, James and his brother John up to a high mountain. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light, and there appeared Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

It is not something you see every day. Not even together with Jesus. We can’t imagine how exactly it was, our language probably doesn’t have fitting words to express it. But we can observe what was the reaction of the apostles.

Peter as usually couldn’t keep silent and had to say something. This time he couldn’t hide his excitement. That was so good to be there! “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

Matthew didn’t write it, but we can easily imagine that Peter and two others were quite keen to enjoy this blissful state as long as possible. I think we can relate to the apostles’ desire. Probably many of us have had quite similar experiences. Just think, we come to the Church, to the Divine service, the Lord has promised to come among us and bless us with His holy presence.

Not always, but sometimes we may have almost heavenly experiences. When the Holy Spirit purifies you, when Jesus body and blood strengthens you and fills you with true joy, when you hear the Gospel about God’s loving attitude towards you... you, and when you are touched by unconditional love and fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ...

How do you feel then? That’s a really good feeling, isn’t it? That’s a feeling we would like to retain for as long as possible. To forget about daily struggles, about problems in family, foolishness of people around us, conflicts at work, sicknesses, wearing responsibilities, about our own shameful passions, about pain and hurt, that we inevitably encounter in this broken world. To be at peace...

This really is as close as we can get to God’s kingdom here on earth. When we have it, when we experience it, aren’t we keen to say, - it is good to be here, let us make a tent and stay here.

These are times, when we don’t want to leave the church, when we want to stay for few more minutes... and few more... and few more. I guess most of us can relate to what the apostles were seeking when they saw the glory of Jesus.

But ... this wasn’t meant to happen. Not then for them. Not now for us. As Peter “was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Listen to Him!

These words can be understood generally as a command to listen to Jesus, for He is the Son of God, but in Matthew's narrative they probably have much more specific meaning. What is it?

If we take a look events and Jesus words that preceded the transfiguration, it becomes clear what exactly God the Father meant, by 'listen to Him'. Just few days ago Jesus had asked His disciples what they thought He was? As a collective answer Peter provided his famous confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mat 16:16)

Then Jesus had explained what kind of Christ He was. He had come to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Mat 16:21)

Then Jesus said the words, which were hard for His disciples, and they are similarly hard for us as well. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me..." (Mat 16:24)

Remember, "this is my beloved Son... listen to him!" When the disciples heard this voice, their dream was ruined. No tents, no staying in the presence of glorified Christ, Moses and Elijah. Instead, - listen to Him!

When they heard this voice, they felt on their faces and were terrified. We don't hear this voice in the same way they heard. But we can hear much clearer these words which we need to listen to. 'Deny yourselves, take up your crosses and follow Jesus!' They can be terrifying as well.

We are also longing for blissful moments in the presence of our Lord. Aren't we? Who wouldn't want it? That's why it seems so natural to shelter ourselves from the hostile world around us, trying to enjoy God's peace and Christian fellowship and mutual love in safe and friendly environment. To build a tent...

We come to this island of peace, to refresh ourselves, to have a rest, to enjoy loving relationships and support of brothers and sisters. It is wonderful experience! Similar to one that Peter, John and James had on the mountain with Jesus. Is there anything wrong to desire it? No... We need to do as much as we can to provide this island of peace for those who are exhausted, broken and abused by the world.

But, there is a place and time for everything. The three disciples saw this wonderful vision, the divine glory of our Lord, Moses and Elijah. This glimpse was given to them to strengthen them, to show where they are heading. What joy, peace and happiness they are going to inherit.

When we experience the blessings of true Christian fellowship in the presence of our Lord, we also are having a little foretaste of the glorious life to come. But the same way as the apostles were sent to bear their crosses, we are sent to bear ours.

And we can be terrified from the thought alone, that being a disciple of Jesus is not about escaping from this world, not leaving it and looking for a refuge behind safe walls of the Church, but actually about going back into the world and carrying our crosses.

This is what disciples were required to do. This is what Moses and Elijah were required to do. After seeing this future glory, after having this foretaste of our ultimate hope, the Kingdom of God, they all were sent to carry their crosses.

You think it was easy for them? This is what Moses said in despair: “I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once...” (Num. 11:14-15)

That’s what Jesus said: “O faithless and twisted generation... How long am I to bear with you?” (Mat 17:17) Of course, you know what happened with Jesus. At the most crucial moment everyone, everyone abandoned Him. Everyone, even His beloved disciples.

Apostle Paul encouraging Christians in Antioch said that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Act 14:22) And you know what happened with apostles themselves, do you? How they carried their crosses.

They spent their lives giving their testimonies about what they have seen and heard, about their risen Lord, and they all apart from apostle John were murdered. According to the Church tradition, Peter was crucified upside down, Andrew was crucified, James beheaded, Matthew beaten till death with axe, Mathias burned alive, Thomas thrust through with spears, and so on.

What does it mean to us, to carry our crosses? Are they similar to the apostles? You never know. You can say that their death actually wasn’t their cross. This was their ultimate confession of faith to their Risen Lord.

There is nothing mystical about our crosses. Sure, we can say that the apostles had unique mission. True, but we all are created for unique missions so that through us God the Creator could take care of His creation and creatures.

We are here to serve people in our lives. To serve them selflessly in two ways, to their spiritual needs as well as physical. Both of these tasks may be difficult and tiresome, these are our crosses.

To care for children who listen to culture more than to you, for spouses who don’t do much for your marriage, for relatives who are ungrateful, for employers or employees who are fools, for state that may seem so corrupted. How wouldn’t we look for an escape?

Even more difficult could be to serve others spiritually. It may be difficult to tell the truth that can brake relationships. It can be difficult to call things as they are,

to call to repentance our loved ones, to rebuke lies when we hear them shamelessly presented as a truth.

To bring the Gospel to those around us. Even if this is the most wonderful news, you know how people tend to react to it. Of course, we are not exactly at the risk of being stoned, crucified. At least not for now. But we still can be ridiculed, arrogantly looked upon with contempt and so on.

That's why we may be easier to hide from the world. "Stop being afraid," that's what Jesus said to His disciples, and this He says to us. He promised to be with you, He kept His promise and sent you His Spirit, He and the Father dwell with you. (John 14:23) Stop being afraid!

To serve our neighbors and to be Jesus witnesses in this broken world may be scary, but that's exactly why He showed us this glimpse of future glory. For when you know what awaits you, nothing seems too hard.

The testimonies of the apostles, the images of glory, peace and joy of God's Kingdom, this is the source of our strength and courage.

How did this bunch of Galilean fishermen find the courage to share the Gospel not being afraid even to lose their lives. How? When they knew what awaits them.

Where can we get a courage to carry our crosses? When we listen to God's promises, when we imagine the coming beauty that the apostles have seen and told us, when we enjoy a glimpse of it in the Divine Service, in love and fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let's be honest, to carry your cross isn't easy. Never will be. But when you learn about what crosses Jesus and the apostles have carried for you, what the Father has prepared for you, when you keep imagining it, we can say together with apostle Paul that we "consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Rom 8:18)

Jesus disciples, bunch of simple guys, strengthened with these revelations did no less than built the Church. The Church which endures forever. You don't have identical task, but you are also called by the same God, the same Jesus. You have received the same Spirit, not a spirit of fear, but of Son-ship.

What they did, sharing the Gospel and serving others, also you are called to do. Results are not up to us. But if only we trust our Lord, if only we faithfully do what we are called, an outcome can surprise us. Stop being afraid, deny yourself, take your cross and follow Jesus, for your reward is already waiting for you.

Amen.