

“Shine, you, glorious beings!” Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

You know how it is, you meet someone and then you start your conversation, and what are among the first questions that people often ask? That’s right! What do you do? And this is where I have a problem... How do I answer? What do I say?

O, you see, I am a registered minister of religion. This is how we sign marriage certificates. I am a Lutheran pastor. What? Who are you? Then I need to go back to the minister of religion thing... You may wonder, why do I have a problem with this?

Because it sounds nothing like, not even remotely close to what my calling as a pastor is. There is no description, as far as I know, that would actually reflect the greatness of this calling. So, I try to be creative and use big words.

I, I am an ambassador of the truth. I am in the business of fighting the darkness and foolishness. I am a student and a teacher of wisdom. I am a messenger of beauty for our lives. I deal with the greatest questions of our human existence.

I am in this business of transforming people’s lives, in changing cultures and changing the world, by bringing them joy, by helping them to discover meaning, by giving them hope, by bestowing upon them true peace, etc.

I have tried these and then people just look at me ... “and what do you do”? Then I am back to the square # 1. Okay, I am a minister of religion. This is a real challenge and my thoughts return to it from time to time.

How to put in words the majestic greatness of what being a Christian truly is about? How can you briefly tell that we are the keepers of God’s mysteries? That we carry and speak the words that are not just words, but – Spirit and life.

That we can literarily speak to them, from our mouth into their ears and their hearts, nothing less than... the eternal life, God’s forgiveness, the truth, the salvation, the wisdom of the Triune God, His joy, and hope and peace.

How can we communicate this indescribable grandeur that the Church of Christ is?! Sometimes we may feel like poor relatives to this world. Small in numbers, insignificant. Not relevant. Aging. Being criticized for what some, who claimed to be Christians, did 1000 years ago. Being labelled as backwards and unloving. On the wrong side of the history. Often rejected and despised by the world. And sadly, from time to time the world wears the faces of our loved ones.

As Paul wrote to Corinthians: “Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.” Society don’t think that we are as impressive as tall and shiny buildings of banks and corporations.

We are not as desirable as movie, or music or sport stars. We are not as appealing to imitate as those who have made fortune for themselves. We don’t have the glory or riches or fame that the world desires. Okay, may be if you are in some shiny Pentecostal megachurch, then you can get a bit of that...

And because this is how things are, we may suffer from the lack of self-worth. We may not want to speak about who we are. Christians, the Church, the body of Christ. God’s Temple. His chosen people. Royal priesthood. Jesus’ disciples.

We may be shy to confess what we believe to be true and good. For who is going to listen to us anyway. We will only embarrass ourselves. Even as we hold our faith somewhat dear to us, we may not want other to know much about this aspect of our lives. If no one asks, let’s not bring it up.

It is understandable. Today society tries to silence Christian voices. They try to tell that our faith has to be our private thing. Don’t show it, don’t speak about it. They also use this primitive tool that is called “group identity”. What is it?

They don’t look at what you actually believe and confess and how you live, they just go: “O, you are Christian, so you belong to the same group of people who did the Crusades, and the inquisition, who burned innocent witches, and suppressed the science, and, of course... don’t forget! Yes! Paedophiles...”.

Is that the group where you belong? This is how we may experience pressure from the outside. But then there are also problems from the inside. One of them is when Christians neglect or even refuse to use their God’s given reason.

As some of you have shared it with me, there has been even in the Lutheran Church this sentiment: “Don’t get too close to the Bible. It’s too hard, too heavy. You may get confused, don’t study it, don’t read it too much, keep safe distance, don’t question anything, just ... have simple faith!”

Sure, it is enough for our salvation. But it is not enough to continue our mission. Seeing our weakness, our Biblical illiteracy, the world comes after us joyfully rubbing hands: “Now we will get you!” And get us they did. Our young ones.

Not one but already two generations. The world came to our schools, and into our homes through media, shining with the scientific knowledge, and waiving the flag

of freedom from old moral shackles. It encouraged our young ones: “Question, question everything, and if they don’t know what to say, come follow us! We have the answer, we have the freedom, with us you could be your own master, you could do whatever you want!” And off they went... Of course, the world didn’t give them what it promised, but that that was never an option.

Think for a moment – how could we be attractive to others, if we don’t like ourselves? If we don’t appreciate, or sometimes don’t even know and don’t even care about the rich and beautiful divine treasures entrusted to us?! How?

And if we begin to see ourselves as poor and rejected relatives, then we will be hungry for any positive attention. We will crave it and we will be ready to do whatever it takes, so that only someone would approve us.

“Just play with us, we will do whatever you ask!” Just reflect – do you find attractive people who don’t value themselves, who are ready to do whatever someone says so that only they could get their attention? It means they stand for nothing, and they value nothing, they have nothing that matters.

This is not us. By no means! And our today’s reading reminds about it again. We can see some connections between the Transfiguration of Jesus and the Church’s situation today. Some encouraging connections.

Who was this Jesus? Just a guy. A carpenter from Nazareth. His brothers and sisters still lived there. He was one of us. Just like us. No outwardly glory, we could say – nothing special. And, yes, at His Cross He was almost alone.

Just His mother and a couple more women and John the apostle. This is how the world saw Him. This is what was revealed to their eyes. But... during His Transfiguration the Father showed to these few of His closed disciples the true nature of who Jesus was.

That under the ordinary and shy cover of human flesh, there was the majestic divine nature of the eternal Son of God. Suddenly this Jesus, their Teacher was transfigured and His face shone like the sun.

His clothes became dazzling white. There was such indescribable beauty, there was such intense experience of goodness and blessedness, of awe and joy and peace, that ... Peter and James and John forgot about everything else.

Suddenly the disciples had been given a glimpse of what is to come, of what our life will be like in the New Heavens and the New Earth. They could only exclaim: “Lord, it is good for us to be here...”. Let’s stay here! Let this heavenly experience never end!

This is what the Church is like. The glorious body of Christ, our Divine Lord. Of course, for now this is not what can be seen with naked human eyes. Most of time even we ourselves forget about it. Nevertheless, this is what we are.

This is how God the Father already sees us. This is how Jesus sees us. This is what is to come. We are like butterflies, even if that analogy falls short. Now we are in this ordinary and lowly form of ours.

But ... when that Day comes, we will be transformed to be like Jesus. We will be these glorious beings created and redeemed to live eternally. You see, Christians are not ordinary people. You are God's own people.

The Triune God Himself has chosen you, and not just yesterday, He has chosen you before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him. Just think to what length our God went to get us here, to get us with Him.

He sacrificed Himself so that only He could have us with Him. He has prepared a new home for us. He has promised to raise us in new glorified bodies, when we will be like Him. Whatever it means... I really don't know. But it probably is so much more that we could ever imagine.

We will be without sin, without anything shameful, without anything impure, we will be washed clean, beautiful, strong, wise, gracious, adventurous, compassionate and so on, and our surroundings will be filled with God's holiness and He will dwell among us. And we will know Him as our God.

This is who you are. The gathering of the most majestic, the most glorious beings that exist. God's own children. Remember, Jesus calls you His brothers and sisters, His friends. God the Father calls you co-heirs with Jesus, His son.

This is who you are. Now – why are we here? Because the greatest treasure, the most powerful thing in entire Universe is entrusted to us, – the Gospel message. We are the ambassadors of the Triune God.

We are the keepers and carriers of the force that has the power to create new life, even eternal life, the power to transform peoples and cultures, to shape destiny of nations and civilizations, as the history has shown it numerous times.

And the Triune God has entrusted it to us. How much He trusts us, I wonder... He trusts that we will make this message known to the world that sinks in darkness and hopelessness. We are the beacons of this divine, eternal hope.

This is who you are. I pray that our Lord blesses us richly, that the Holy Spirit helps us to never be ashamed of who we are, even if the world despises us. That with His help we can comprehend and rejoice in what God has made of us and in what He has promised us.

That we can indeed walk joyfully and graciously as who we are, with heads high lifted, radiating God's wisdom in our words and in our actions, so that this world can learn the truth about the Trine God and the way back to Him, to His Church. May we grow to be a community of God's people where everyone could come and say from the depth of their hearts: "Lord, it is good for us to be here, we want to stay." Amen.