

“Brace for the glory!” Mark 9:2-9

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The transfiguration of Jesus. Three out of the four Gospel accounts describe it. Since ancient times we have had a Sunday set apart in our Church year to commemorate this event and to reflect on it. It must be something quite special.

What if this event describes for us what Christian life is like? Yes, what if this event speaks about each one of you? What if it tells you what it means to be a Christian, what stages we go through in our faith journey, and what amazing encouragement our God gives to us as we strive to listen to His Son Jesus.

Let's first look at **what happened**, then **what this event teaches us**, and **how our God encourages us through this event**. What happened, what this event teaches us, and how our God graciously encourages us.

What happened? We need to go back to what happened before this event. A few verses earlier Mark describes one of the most significant conversations between Jesus and His disciples. **“Who do people say that I am?”**

And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:27-29) Yes, you are correct, Peter!

What an excitement! Jesus from Nazareth is the Christ! This man is the promised Saviour. The One they have been waiting for since times immemorable. What a joy to have found Him! He is the One who will deliver them.

He is the One who will deliver for them whatever their hearts may desire – freedom, protection, glory, prosperity, etc. However, their excitement was short lived as Jesus immediately says something that not only spoils the moment, but also doesn't make much sense. **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”**

(Mark 8:31) What was that about?! This didn't make much sense to the disciples until they finally saw the resurrected Jesus. Jesus will suffer?! But He is the One! He is the Christ, the Son of living God! What sufferings are you talking about? "No, no, no, Jesus! May this never happen to you!" Thus Peter. Jesus in response: "Get behind me, Satan!"

But then it gets even worse. Seriously worse. **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."** (Mark 8:34-35) This just doesn't make sense!

Why do people need God? Why are people looking for God? Because despite our best efforts the time comes when we need to face the reality – we are not gods. Usually this happens when we face some challenges larger than us, when we realize we need someone who is much more powerful than we, someone who is in control.

Put simply, we need someone who will be strong enough to sort out our problems and to overcome our enemies. We need a Saviour, we need a victorious Saviour, someone who is in charge, who stumps all His enemies under His feet. We need God!

What a rollercoaster for Jesus' disciples! First, the amazing revelation that He, indeed, is the One the prophets of old spoke about. Great, He is our solution! But then, no! What is going on, He will suffer and be killed?! No! And what is all that nonsense about the rising from the dead! But then it gets even worse, much worse.

They are called to suffer. They are called to follow this Christ and to deny themselves. They are called to give up their lives. How to make sense?! They rejoiced in having found someone who will free them from their sufferings and will give them good lives.

Now... Jesus is promising more suffering and asking them to give up even the lives they have. What a great deal! I wonder what thoughts and emotions were running through their heads and hearts. Then, a few days later, comes this event, transfiguration.

Jesus takes Peter and John and James and leads them up to a high mountain. And what do they see? What do they experience? Yes, Jesus is the One, thanks be to God! He is this glorious and majestic being of indescribable beauty, out of this world. Finally, after all this strange talk about sufferings, some really good news. Alleluia!

Not just good news, what is given to the three is a glimpse, whatever imperfect, of another reality, of something so much better. They don't know what to say. It is so good! "Let's stay here, Jesus!" We will make you three tents, just let this continue.

And as soon as they expressed their desire to remain in that state of bliss... **"a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only."** A glimpse is just that, a glimpse. Here it was, and it was gone.

But the words from the glory cloud were still echoing in their ears: **“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”** Listen to Him! But... “Listen to what?” This is what happened and now we can reflect on what this means for us, for our Christian lives.

What does this event teach us? Listen to what? Did you already notice the similarities with our journeys of faith? When we meet God, when we discover the Triune God, when we learn about Jesus, there is a lot of joy, there is a lot of excitement.

And a good share of it may be thanks to our old Adam in us. We are excited because we have found God, someone who will help us, who is so much more powerful than we are, someone who can protect us, to save us from our sufferings, someone who can do for us what we are not able to do on our own. Isn't that great?! **“Listen to Him!”**

But as we keep listening to this Jesus, we receive mixed signals. He is almighty, yes, He is fully in control of everything down to the tiniest details, yes! But He is not that kind of God, who comes to destroy His enemies and our enemies. He is that kind of God who comes to lay down His life... for His enemies, and that includes us.

He is that kind of God who wants everyone to be saved, **“a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench.”** (Mt 12:20) This is so different from what we would naturally expect from an all-powerful Saviour. And we know that He did save us through His own innocent sufferings and His own death.

As we keep listening, it gets stranger and stranger. Yes, He is God who suffers, and He also invited His disciples to imitate Him. Actually, He makes this a condition for us: **“If you want to come after me, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.”**

“Listen to Him!” Jesus suffered and we are invited to suffer, and that is a part of Christian life. Our flesh will resist as much as possible; it doesn't want to deny its desires and passions and to give up on being at the centre of our attention. No way!

The Devil will attack us, and our loved ones, trying to hurt us, trying to sway us from following this strange Suffering Saviour. The world will hate us. Irrationally. If we want to be Jesus' disciples we will always be at odds with the societies we live in.

Brace for trials and temptations, internal and external. This is what Christian life is about. From beginning till end. Brace for sufferings, so that only we could save someone else, and lead them to our Suffering God, Jesus from Nazareth.

But... this is by no means a gloomy perspective. Not at all! On that mountain top Jesus' disciples experienced only a glimpse, they only witnessed transfiguration of Jesus, and they were ready to forget their lives so that only that experience would continue.

We are witnesses of something infinitely greater – Jesus' resurrection and ascension. We know what happened after His sufferings and death. We know that we will follow our Lord and Saviour so that where He is, He has promised to take us as well.

He has already gone to prepare a place for you! This is our hope! Certain and sure hope! And **this is how our Triune God encourages** us through this event. He is God Almighty, yes! He comes and suffers with us and for us, yes!

He also invites us to suffer with Him for the sake of the Gospel, and, yes, the Spirit tells us what to expect after these minor sufferings in this age – overwhelming goodness and blessedness, heavenly glory, and joy and splendour beyond comparison.

Jesus suffered terribly. Physical sufferings being only a part of it. The sin of the entire world and the full force of God's anger was upon Him. And most painfully, He was separated from those He had loved eternally, His Father and the Holy Spirit, and that's what made His sufferings truly unbearable.

In comparison, we only suffer a little, whatever comes our way. Besides, we live day by day, and we face our sufferings as they come. Jesus knew from the very beginning what path He was choosing for our sake. He knew what was to come. All the time.

Jesus suffered and was beaten so badly that He couldn't anymore carry His cross. We usually, with a few exceptions, may only be beaten by harsh words of rejection. Jesus died and as Paul the apostle explains we are now united with Him in His death.

But Jesus had to physically go to that cross! We are counted as dead with Jesus, but He had to stretch His hands to be nailed to the wood. We may be put in uncomfortable situations because of our Christian faith and convictions, but Jesus was fighting for every breath as He was suffocating on the cross.

Our hearts may hurt, when we get rejected because of the Gospel, Jesus' heart was pierced by the soldier's spear. What helped Jesus to endure all of this? Do you wonder? What motivation, what hope was so incredibly strong, so powerful? The answer is you!

He was looking forward to the day, when He will welcome and embrace you in His Kingdom. That was His hope. He had the same hope that we have now. That we will see Him as He is, and that we will be made like Him. That the Risen Jesus will embrace you: "Come, come and see the place that I have prepared for you!"

Paul the apostle also had been given a glimpse of what is to come for those who follow Jesus. As Paul put it so wonderfully, and he too had tasted more sufferings than we ever will: **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."** (Rom 8:18)

Brace for the glory! For the glory that is prepared for us in the world to come, we can't imagine it, unless God Himself gifts us a glimpse. May He send His Spirit and help us to experience what Peter, John and James experience on that mountain top, and may He fill us all with joyful desire to follow Jesus as faithfully as those men did.

Until we meet them on the other side...

Amen.