

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

## A Closer Look



"No one in our house has to eat anything she doesn't want," I told my almost five-year-old daughter at dinner the other night.

I was responding to Lynn's insistence that she did not want to eat the tiny helping of squash set before her. Of course, she knew that by not eating her squash she was, in effect, relinquishing her right to snack after her meal. The "no-vegetable, no-snack" policy is a common one in households with children, and my household is no exception.

The policy is a good one. In fact, the lure of snacks can be a healthy enticement for children to eat foods that they otherwise would not.

So I thought I had the problem licked. I was sure that in the next second Lynn would swallow those two spoonfuls of squash and be all ready for her dessert.

But in a way characteristic of her age, Lynn dawdled and dawdled. Eventually, I sent Lynn running to her room under orders not to return to the table until she had made a firm decision to eat her squash.

By the time Lynn returned to the table, I was already washing dishes in the kitchen. From the sink, where she couldn't quite see me, I glanced back at the table to

check on Lynn's progress. To my astonishment, I saw her attempt to eat her squash, but literally gag on it. In fact, she almost seemed ready to be sick.

I quickly went over to her, picked up the plate and told her she had eaten enough.

Immediately, I decided that Lynn wouldn't have to worry about eating squash for a long while. I was learning that there's a point at which discipline can be carried beyond its purpose.

It must be the same way with God and us, also. Would Jesus really force us to do something we hated? Certainly, God asks us to do some things for our own good, in the same way parents require small children to wear boots when the weather calls for them.

But discipline that causes us to strain under a burden greater than what is good or healthy for us can't really be what God wants. Like a loving parent, God only asks us to do things that are necessary for our growth and well-being.

I love Lynn more than the discipline and rules I ask her to obey. In the same way, God loves us more than the rules He asks us to follow.

Father Albert Shamon

## A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 17:1-9; (R1) Genesis 12:1-4; (R2) Timothy 1:8-10.

Six days after Peter's confession at Caesarea-Philippi, Jesus started His journey south to Jerusalem to celebrate the Paschal Mystery: His death and resurrection.

When He reached the southeastern part of lower Galilee, He ascended Mt. Tabor with Peter, James and John. The mountain rises suddenly, like a camel's hump, 1,650 feet above the surrounding plain. It is so steep, in fact, that modern-day travelers have to abandon their buses and take taxis to reach the summit, the site of the Church of the Transfiguration.

The transfiguration of Jesus is closely linked to the Caesarea-Philippi event, at which Peter confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God. The voice on Tabor confirmed that confession: "This is my beloved Son."

Following that confession, Jesus began to speak about His coming death and resurrection. But Peter would not hear of such a thing. So on the mount, Moses and Elijah appeared to reaffirm that Jesus, who had fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, was going to die — to pass over (*exodon*) from this life to another life, a transfigured one. The voice ratified all this by commanding the apostles to listen to Jesus, even when He spoke about death.

Matthew, we must remember, presents Christ as the prophet greater than Moses. So Matthew located the transfiguration on a mountain — traditionally, Mt. Tabor; possibly, Mt. Hermon. In Matthew, a mountain is not a geographical spot, but always a place of revelation. Both Moses and Elijah received revelation on a mountaintop. Thus Jesus reveals who He is from the summit of a mountain.

Mark, in his transfiguration account, emphasizes the garments of Jesus. Matthew, on the contrary, focuses on Jesus' face — "His face became dazzling as the sun." When Moses came down from Sinai, his face was so bright it had to be veiled (Exodus 34:27-35). But his was a reflected glory. Not so with Jesus: His glory burst from within Himself and illuminated not only His face but His very garments.

Peter again is given prominence by Matthew, for Matthew sees Peter as the chief rabbi. Once more, Peter is his old, over-confident self, as he blurts out,

"Lord, how good it is for us to be here!" (good in the sense that he could provide for Jesus). At that, Moses and Elijah start to leave. Peter, to prolong the ecstatic vision, cries out, "Wait; if you want, we'll build three booths for you all."

To put an end to Peter's excited chatter, a bright cloud engulfs them all. The inclusion of the apostles in the cloud suggests that they were intended to share the destiny of Jesus. Hence the revelation, to strengthen and prepare them for their roles, not at all unlike those of Moses and Elijah.

Visitors to London can tell if the queen is in residence at Buckingham Palace. When the Union Jack flies over the palace, the queen is there. Likewise, in Scripture, the cloud is the emblem used to show that God is in residence or dwells where the cloud is for the time being (*shekinah*). The bright cloud — bright, because God's glory was shining through it like the sun — symbolized His presence on Mount Tabor.

Out of the cloud came a voice that terrified the apostles. But Jesus laid His hand on them. In Matthew, whenever Jesus touched people, He healed them. Here He heals His own fear, one of the commonest maladies of life. When they looked up, the disciples didn't see anyone but Jesus.

As we grow in grace, all other things should decrease. Only Jesus should increase in our lives, until we see no one, nothing else, but Jesus.

The Tabor experiences of our lives are often brief and passing — no booths for permanent earth dwellings. Frequently, such experiences are followed by the Calvary periods. Eternity breaks into our lives for a moment and then recedes again, and we find ourselves back in the "real" world. But Jesus remains with us still. So we need never be afraid if, looking up, we see no one but Jesus.

A Spanish artist painted a picture of the Last Supper. When friends came in to view the work, all exclaimed, "What lovely cups!" The artist took his brush and blotted out the cups. The central figure, he said, is Christ. Nothing must divert one's attention from Him. In our own lives, therefore, our attention and focus should be fixed on nothing else but Jesus.

With Him, in Him, through Him, we can walk through the Good Fridays of life to the Mount of Transfiguration — resurrection!

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