

Chaplain's Bulletin August 6, 2023



Dear Folks,

This is the feast of the Transfiguration. It's a beautiful story, giving a taste of the glory of Jesus, but is there more to it than that?

Of course. First, let's get some background. Old Testament prophecies led the Israelites to expect the coming of a new Elijah and a new Moses.

“Remember the law of Moses, my servant, whom I charged at Horeb with statutes and ordinances for all Israel. Now I am sending you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day; he will turn the heart of fathers to their sons and the heart of sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction (Malachi 3:22-24).” This was fulfilled in John the Baptist. “As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, ‘What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swaying in the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare the way before you.” Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force. All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come (Matthew 11:7-14).” “As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, ‘do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’ Then his disciples asked him, ‘Why do the scriptures say that Elijah must come first?’ He said in reply, ‘Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples realized that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist (Matthew 17:9-13).”

Elijah was perhaps the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, and he proclaimed a drought, called down fire from heaven, killed 450 priests of Baal, and turned the Israelites away from Baal worship (1 Kings 17-18). He also had an encounter with God on a mountain (1 Kings 19).

Moses had said, “A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kindred; this is the one to whom you shall listen (Deuteronomy 18:15).” So when God's voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him (Matt 17:5b)” they would have connected it to the prophecy in Deuteronomy. “As Moses came down Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he spoke with the Lord (Exodus 34:29).” When Jesus' face “shone like the sun (Mat 17:2)” that echoed the radiance of Moses face.

Moses was the instrument of the covenant, the Passover, the exodus from Egypt, manna, and led them to a new promised land. Brant Pitre in his book "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" talks about Jewish expectation for a new Moses, a new temple, and a new exodus with a new manna to a new promised land. There will be other references to Jesus as the new and improved Moses (see John 6:30-33). He encountered God on a mountaintop.

Jesus was not just one more prophet. He is the fulfillment of the promises that God made to his people. We often don't see it, but God's plan encompasses the whole picture, and when we step back we can see how things connect.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim