

Letter to a prisoner

When a person feels abandoned by God

Parable of the Good - Samaritan Human nature in the Midst of the Divine

Transfiguration -10 Questions and answers.

8/6-8/19 2016 Transfiguration of the Savior

Dear ...:

I am replying to your letter Postmarked Aug I came to the unit this past Wed, but it was at that difficult time – 11pm. I am sorry I missed you. I come to Michael the 1st Wed at 8am, so I can celebrate liturgy, then I go to Powledge. They are a smaller unit, more laid back, and it is easier to see everyone, whether it is early in the morning, or at 11. Unfortunately, Michael, as you know is not as laid back, and is much bigger. When I come to Michael the 3rd Wed at 11, I see about half of you. I have considered making visits two days in the week, but I am not sure I have the funds or time, so I piggy back two prisons together, and we have what we have.

I am **not** dissuaded in any way because of the letters I get from you! You can send one a week, or two or three! I will try my best to keep up, and write back. I am very happy that you are writing.

You said that you had tears, but they dried before they fell because you figured you were not worth the attention. I wish you would not think like that. We **should** think that we are sinners, and even terrible sinners, but despair is a tool of the demons. God always thinks we are “worth the attention”. There are worse people than you and me who have become great Saints. Saint Mary of Egypt is the first example I can think of. I will send you her life. Read it carefully, then read it again. Then, read it again.

I guarantee to you; God will never abandon you. You and I were made for a purpose and His image remains inside us, even when we sin. We are not dead, until we die without repentance. Repentance is to be sorry and to try to change. Some stuff is really hard to change. God will help us – according to His timing. I could give you a zillion scriptures to prove all this, and I will do it if you want me to. Suffice it to say that I pray for you and always will. Although my prayers are poor, I do pray, and I will never give up. I am glad you are praying.

You are right that “long neglect can render many of these incurable”, but I do not think you understand the deep meaning of this quotation. We are never incurable if we are trying. The marvelous thing is that even after long neglect, if we begin to try, God will always respond and help us. The incurable person is the one who does not think he has a problem, and does not repent. That person has killed his conscience. As long as we have a conscience that is alive, even if it may be dormant, we are alive. Your letter proves you have a conscience, and therefore, you are alive.

I will tell you about one scripture now. The **Parable of the Good Samaritan** (Luke 10:25-37) has many important teachings. I will tell you just a little bit. The man who ventured from Jerusalem to Jericho represents all sinful men. Jerusalem is in the mountains, and is cool, temperate, and beautiful. Jericho is in the valley, and in the summer is oppressively hot. His journey down from Jerusalem to Jericho represents our sinful life. He is met by thieves, who rob him and leave him naked and half dead. The stripping of his raiment represents the stripping of virtue from a

man – clothing represents virtue in the scriptures. He was left “half dead”, because the demons, who are represented as thieves, cannot kill us. They can wound us and tempt us to sin, and we can be left “half-dead”, unable to help ourselves extricate ourselves from our sinful lifestyle and the consequences of our sin, but God will always come to help us. He is represented by the Samaritan. He poured oil and wine on the wounds – which were caused by the man’s sins. He bound the wounds. This means that He alone can give us strength to fight our sins, and to defeat them. When a wound is medicated and dressed, the bleeding is stopped and recovery can begin. This may be a long and difficult process, but there are no wounds that God cannot cure.

I do not know anything about TDCJ’s rules on “Vows of silence” Please tell me more. Prison does not strike me as a very quiet place!

Try reading the Wisdom of Solomon. It is in the Orthodox study bible. If you do not have it, I will try to get one for you. Here are some things I have written about Wisdom. I love this book, and read it many times over throughout the year.

“... Thou, our God, art gracious and true, patient, and ordering all things in mercy. If we sin we are Thine, knowing Thy greatness, and if we sin not, we know that we are counted with Thee. For to know Thee is perfect justice, and to know Thy justice, and Thy power, is the root of immortality.” Wisdom 15: 1-3
Centuries before the birth of Christ a perfect summation of the Gospel. Here the purpose of life is well described.

“For the beginning of fornication is the devising of idols and the invention of them is the corruption of Life.” Wisdom 14: 12

This is an apt description of pro-choice and pro transsexual and pro-homosexual identity politics/ Investigate the rhetoric regarding all manner of sexual immorality. In all of this rhetoric the self is exalted and it is made an idol. God's law is ignored and vilified, and the only criterion for truth is what a person feels.

The sin of Onan

You asked about the saying: “It is better to cast your seed in the belly of a whore than spill it on the ground.”

This is not in the Bible. There is an incident where a man spilled his seed upon the ground. His name was Onan, and his action was a sin, because he wanted to have the pleasure of sexual intercourse without having a child. Does this sound like our modern times? His action was coitus interruptus – he pulled out before climaxing, so that his wife would not get pregnant. Onan was guilty of disobeying Jewish law. He was responsible to marry the widow of his brother and “raise up seed to his brother”. In our day, we have a term: “Onanism”, which is the same as masturbation, although this was not Onan’s sin. His sin was disobedience, selfishness, and likely, lust.

And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. (9) And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled *it* on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. (10) And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also. Genesis 38:8-10

It is certainly a worse sin to have sex with a prostitute, or any kind of fornication, because this sin involves two people, and causes the other person to also sin. It does not matter if sex is with a prostitute or anyone else – fornication is a violation of the 6th commandment and the “second great commandment” (not from the Ten Commandments, but the second commandment which is like the Greatest Commandment – The Greatest Commandment is to love God with all the heart, all the soul, and the mind and all the strength, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself). *Any* time we involve our neighbor in sin, and cause their participation in sin, we are guilty of violating the second greatest commandment.

This saying is just a way of “**making excuse with excuses in sin**” (Psalm 140:4, sung at all Vespers services). It is a sin to fornicate, and it is a sin to masturbate. Certainly, the former is worse than the latter, because it causes our neighbor to sin. In our lax, self-indulgent and anti-dogmatic days, the very idea that a person is responsible to control his sexual impulses is akin to heresy, and some would even call this a mental illness. Christians know better. We follow God’s law, even if imperfectly, because it is a reflection of Who God is, and is the way of life. Fornication, with a prostitute or not, and sexual self-indulgence, whether with a prostitute or by oneself, is the way of death. These are hard words for some, but the scripture is full of hard words. We must remember that “**With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.**” (Matthew 19:26) God DEMANDS our effort and desire, but He does not demand our competence. He supplies competence to those who struggle.

Your ideas about time are interesting, but they are hard for me to understand. I know only that God became man, and took on weak humanity – you say this when you say “he went into this as a pathetic human”. The wonder is that Jesus Christ made His humanity perfect, and immortal, and capable of defeating death. He passed this ability on to us “pathetic humans” through baptism. There is much to talk about here, or better, to understand, through experience. We read the scriptures, we pray, we fast, we forgive our brother, we learn to be humble – and God gives us knowledge of Him and all things.

I never thought of Michael as being the “Prez” and Uriel the “Sergeant at arms”. We do not fully understand how angels work, but we do understand that they are perfectly obedient to God, and can do anything that God tells them to do. You are correct that God could cause Lucifer to cease existing just by “not thinking of him”. All things have their existence only in God. That seems to be a good solution from a human perspective, but this is not God’s perspective.

You asked me where I got all the quotes I sent you. I read a lot, and there are tons of quotes sent via the Internet. It is one of the redeeming qualities of the internet, which also causes and aids so much sin. I am always collecting stuff I want you guys to see. If my secretary was better organized, you would see a lot more of it!

I will fill out this letter to maximize the stamp, and you will also receive another letter, hopefully the same day, with the life of St Mary of Egypt. I can safely send 4 pages in a letter, and you guys tell me I can send up to 7 pages, but I have had 5 pages kicked back to me, so I play it safe, and send only 4 pieces of paper. Double sided, that gives you 8 pages to read, should keep you out of trouble for at least a little while!

I will be back in the unit the 3rd week of Sept. I will miss the 1st week because of travel. I hope I see you, Wed Sep 21, at 11pm!

We celebrated Transfiguration today, so I will give you some stuff about that.

Transfiguration *Human nature in the Midst of the Divine Luke 9:28-36*



In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We say today, brothers and sisters, that humanity can meet Divinity; Humanity can see Divinity; Humanity can be part of Divinity.

In the Old Testament Moses, saw the back parts of God; he was hidden in the cleft of a rock; he didn't see that muchⁱ. But now, face to face, man is with God. Jesus Christ showing He is fully God, shining as the light.

Did you notice something in this historic and prophetic event? Moses and Elias, were conversing with Him, speaking of His decease: That was for the disciples to remember so that they would overwhelmed by the upcoming passion of our Lord.

What were Apostles doing? They were sleeping because it was late at night and they were tired. Man was in the midst of Divinity, Jesus was white as the light, shining as the sun, and they were asleep. This indicates how easily we “sleep”, even when God is among us! We are sleepy because of our passions – O Lord, what are we missing? Divinity is right with us right now. We partake of the Holy Mysteries and Divinity is present. Wherever we go, God is with us and yet we don't see Him.

They woke up, and then the cloud came, signifying the Holy Spirit, and the voice from the cloud, the Father. So this is like a Theophany just like the baptism of the Lord, declaring the Trinity, declaring God.

But then Moses and Elias saw Him and spoke with Him, and they were not frightened by the light, or the sound, or the cloud. This tells us, that we will eventually, even though at this moment our flesh is filled with sins and weakness and foolishness, we will be able to be with Divinity and not be afraid.

But the Apostles were not ready to be fully in the presence of Divinity. They still needed more seasoning, more training. So they were in the midst of Divinity, and for some of it they were asleep. So it is with us. We are in the midst of Divinity and we're asleep. We're more troubled about what's going to happen today and tomorrow and the next day than we are about God being with us.

And of course, the Transfiguration shows us the future for us, not the future for God because all things are as one for God, the past, the future, the present. Jesus was always God. This was nothing new for Him.

This was the first time in history that man was to be able to be face to face with the Uncreated Light of God. They were afraid. They were not like Moses and Elias. It was too much for them. So it will take time for you and me to be able to be in the presence of Divinity and not be afraid.

And how is this? We know: **to follow Christ, to become like Him**. Moses and Elias were like Him, and they were comfortable around Him and at peace and not afraid.

We are trying to become like Him. And if our Lord Jesus Christ were to come to us now and shine in His Divinity, His Uncreated Light, we would be terrified because we are not ready yet. So this time of this light is getting ready, getting ready to see Christ as He is, not with the covering of humanity, but to see Him, His Humanity shining with Divinity because, after all, He is God as well as Man.

So, brothers and sisters, when you look at this story, let it give you some hope. Yes, it is a promise that we will see God.

But just see that they were frail men there on the mountain. First they were asleep and then they were afraid. Does it remind you of anybody? Reminds me of me. It should remind you of you.

But after a time what happened to those men? Their sound went forth over all the world. So it will be with us. We will be changed. But we have to live in the flesh a little bit and struggle a little bit in order to become able to see Divinity.

We see what happens when impure men see Divinity, they're afraid. But later on, Peter spoke of this event with great affection, great longing, because he knew that he was soon going to, as he said, put off this tabernacle and be with the Lord, and he was looking forward with great expectation to seeing the Uncreated Light again, this time without fearⁱⁱ.

So there's the blueprint for our lives. Yes, the promise is there. But the promise only becomes reality for us if we live as Christians, and then we will see Divinity and not be afraid. Amen.

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/feasts-of-the-savior-transfiguration_2008-08-19.html

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/feasts-of-the-savior-transfiguration_2008-08-19.doc

AUDIO: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/feasts-of-the-savior-transfiguration_2008-08-19.mp3

Questions about the Transfiguration

QUESTION 1 Tell the story of the transfiguration, paying attention to the point in Jesus' ministry that it occurred. Which gospels report the Transfiguration?

QUESTION 2 What other event in our Lord's life has obvious similarities to the Transfiguration? Explain

QUESTION 3 How did Jesus' transfiguration prepare the apostles for his subsequent crucifixion?

QUESTION 4 Our Lord's transfiguration contains a tacit but extremely important promise, upon which the whole of Orthodox ascetic theology is built. Comment on this. This emphasis is peculiar to Orthodoxy and is missing from the religions of the West. Speculate why.

QUESTION 5 What virulent relatively early heresy does the Transfiguration emphatically contradict? How?

QUESTION 6 skipped

QUESTION 7 What is the fasting typicon on the Transfiguration?

QUESTION 8 Why were Moses and Elijah present on Mount Tabor?

QUESTION 9 Comment on how the dual nature of Christ was revealed on Mount Tabor, and the implications for our nature.

QUESTION 10 Comment on the implications of the Transfiguration, and the theology of St. Gregory Palamas.

ANSWER 1 The gospels very laconically report the Transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a high mountain, which was Mount Tabor. It was late, and the disciples were overcome with sleep. They awoke to see Him transfigured before them.

He did not change in form, remaining a man in all respects, but his face and garments shone with a light brighter than the sun. This is the "uncreated light", which a man can only see when God reveals Himself to him, and this is only given to the pure of heart, save for some special circumstances, such as the one we are concerned with here. With Christ were Moses and Elias, who spoke with him "things concerning His decease". Peter, in confusion offered to build three tabernacles for the two Saints and the Lord. After this, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice was heard from heaven, which said "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear ye Him". After this, the cloud disappeared, and Christ appeared as He usually was. He strictly charged them to tell of the vision to nobody else, until He was risen from the dead, and they descended the mountain. The Transfiguration is reported in Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-9 and Luke 9:28-36

ANSWER 2 The church understands the Transfiguration to be a "theophany", that is a revelation of the Holy Trinity, just as occurred also at the baptism of the Lord. The services are quite explicit about this.

"Dwelling bodily on earth, / Christ, the Light from before the sun, / Who before His crucifixion fulfilled all things of His awesome dispensation in godly manner, / today hath mystically shown forth on Mount Tabor the image of the Trinity; / for, taking His three excellent disciples, Peter, James and John, / He led them up to it together. / And having hidden His guise of flesh for a little while, / He was transfigured before them, / revealing the majesty of His original beauty, though not completely. / And while making it known to them, / He also took pity upon them, lest they in anywise cease to live because of what they saw: / yet were they able to grasp with their bodily eyes, holding fast. / And Thou didst summon Moses and Elijah, the foremost of the prophets, / who bore witness reliably concerning Thy divinity, / and that it is the true effulgence of the essence of the Father, / O Thou Who hast dominion over the living and the dead. / Wherefore, the cloud enfolded them like a tabernacle, / and the voice of the Father testified, / speaking forth from the cloud like thunder, saying: / "This is My Beloved Son, / Whom I begat incorruptibly from within Me before the morning star, / and Whom I have sent to save / those who are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, / and who confess with faith that the one dominion of the Godhead is indivisible! / Hear ye Him!" / And do Thou Thyself, O Christ God Who lovest mankind, / illumine us with the light of Thine unapproachable glory, / and show us forth as worthy heirs of Thy kingdom which is without end, // in that Thou art all good. (Litya for the Feast, Tone 2)

"The pillar of fire plainly showed to Moses Christ transfigured, and the cloud pointed clearly to the grace of the Spirit that overshadowed Mount Tabor" (matins, second canon, Ode 6, 3rd Troparion)

ANSWER 3 Much of the meaning of a particular event is revealed in the holy services, especially Vespers and Matins. This is why it is absolutely necessary for a Christian to zealously attend the Vigil service. The services, and the commentaries of the holy fathers, which have entered into the mind of the church, explain that the apostles were prepared for the crucifixion by witnessing the Transfiguration, and the "splendor of the resurrection" that it prefigured. They would soon be subjected to terrible temptations and fears, and our Savior wanted to put the knowledge of His divinity indelibly in their minds, to help them in the terrible days of his trial and death.

Kontakion of the Feast, Tone 7: On the mountain wast Thou transfigured, / and Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could bear it, O Christ God; / that when they would see Thee crucified, / they would comprehend that Thy suffering was voluntary, / and proclaim to the world that Thou art of a truth // the Effulgence of the Father.

Before Thy crucifixion, O Lord, / the mountain emulated the heavens, / and the cloud spread itself out like a tabernacle / when Thou wast transfigured and borne witness to by the Father. / There were Peter, James and John, / for they were to be with Thee also at the time of Thy betrayal, / that, beholding Thy wonders, / they might not be afraid of Thy sufferings, / which do Thou vouchsafe that we may venerate in peace, // for the sake of Thy great mercy. (First sticheron of the Feast for Lord I have cried, Tone 4)

Taking the disciples up upon the lofty mountain / before Thy crucifixion, O Lord, / Thou wast transfigured before them, / illumining them with effulgence of power, / desiring both in Thy love for mankind and in Thine authority / to show them the splendor of the resurrection, / which do thou vouchsafe unto us in peace, // in that Thou art merciful and lovest man-kind. (Third sticheron of the Feast for Lord I have cried, Tone 4)

ANSWER 4 The light that shone from Christ is the "uncreated light". It is, as the fathers teach, the "uncreated energies" of God, which all worthy ones will partake of in the last day. God is absolutely transcendent, and unknowable, except as He chooses to reveal Himself. Through the God-man, Jesus Christ, He has made himself knowable, built in his energies only, and not his essence. "God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". St. Basil the Great expresses the mind of the church on this matter: "We know God through His energies, and we cannot presume to approach His essence. Because His energies reach us, but His essence remains inaccessible". The one who was an "eye witness of His majesty" (2 Peter 1: 16) knew well the implications of the transfiguration of the HUMAN flesh of the God-man:

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: {4} Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. " (2 Pet 1:3-4)

The knowledge of this "partaking" of divine nature is ever present in the theology of the Orthodox church. God became man precisely to make our flesh capable of apprehending the divinity. No one can become God, but we have been promised that we will be "partakers of His divine nature". All of our life is appointed towards this end.

St. Gregory Palamas teaches about this important reality quite often: "So, when the saints contemplate this divine light within themselves, seeing it by the divinizing communion of the Spirit, through the mysterious visitations of perfecting illuminations - then they behold the garment of their deification, their mind being glorified and filled by the grace of the Word, beautiful beyond measure in His splendor; just as the divinity of the Word on the mountain glorified with divine light the body conjoined to it. For `the glory which the Father gave Him,' He Himself has given to those obedient to Him, as the Gospel says, and `He willed that they should be with Him and contemplate His glory.'" (St. Gregory Palamas, The Triads)

"David, the ancestor of God, foreseeing in the Spirit / the coming of Thine only-begotten Son in the flesh unto men, / summoneth creation from afar to gladness, / and crieth out prophetically: / "Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy name!" / For, having ascended that mountain with Thy disciples, O Savior, / Thou wast transfigured, / and didst cause the darkened nature of Adam to shine again, / imparting to it the glory and splendor of Thy divinity. /

Wherefore, we cry unto Thee: // O Lord, Creator of all things, glory be to Thee!" (Great Vespers for the feast, Aposticha, Tone 1)

In the West, the idea of the transfiguration of human nature was not emphasized. Relatively early, it fell captive to a legalistic view of salvation. What a man believes, and who he submits to in the organization of the church (i.e., the Pope of Rome) became more important than anything else, and the ascetical practices of Christianity, such as fasting was lost to a great degree. Their understanding of salvation was almost like a contract, whereas in the East it was always understood that the incarnation of the Son of God, and His revelation of the uncreated light, while in the flesh, to men in the flesh, implies that man can become holy and share in the energies of God. We are not just "saved", in the sense of not being punished, but we are made able to be partakers of divine nature.

ANSWER 5 The heresy of "Arianism" states that Jesus Christ is a created being, greater in glory and honor than all other creatures, but created nonetheless, and therefore inferior to God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. The uncreated light that came forth from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the bright cloud, and voice of the Father in the cloud emphatically contradicts such blasphemous conjectures.

ANSWER 7 The Transfiguration of the Lord occurs during the fast for the Dormition of the Theotokos. On this day, fish may be eaten, as well as wine and olive oil, all of which are not eaten on strict fast days, but all meat, cheese and eggs (all animal products) are not eaten.

ANSWER 8 Moses represented the law, and Elijah the prophets. Both the law and the prophets spoke of and pointed to Christ, and were in complete agreement with Him, as their conversation on Mount Tabor shows. Their presence, together with the apostles also underscored that God is the God of the "living and the dead".

"Transfigured on the high mountain, / the Savior, having with Him His pre-eminent disciples, / shone forth most wondrously, / showing them forth as illumined by the loftiness of the virtues / and as ones vouchsafed divine glory. / Moses and Elijah, who spake with Christ, / showed that He hath authority over the living and the dead, / and that He is the God Who of old spake through the law and the prophets. / Of Him was the voice of the Father heard saying from the cloud of light: / "Him do ye obey, / Who through the Cross made hell captive // and granteth life everlasting to the dead!" (Lord I have cried, Tone 4)

"Moses the God-beholder and Elijah of the fiery chariot, / who traversed the heavens without being consumed, / beholding Thee, O Christ, in the cloud at Thy transfiguration, / bore witness to Thee / as the Creator and Fulfiller of the law and the prophets. / With them vouchsafe Thine enlightenment also unto us, O Master, // that we may hymn Thee forever." (Sticheron for "Now and Ever", Aposticha)

The Vespers OT readings provide further mystical illumination concerning the presence of Moses and Elijah. The former asked to see God face to face, and the latter heard Him in the "still small voice". Both intimately experienced the energies of God. Their experiences were a harbinger of things to come.

ANSWER 9 When Christ was transfigured on Mount Tabor, He remained a man. His human flesh shown with the uncreated light, and His divinity and humanity was readily apparent at the same time. This is a promise for those who love Him, and follow his commandments. Our flesh has been made capable of apprehending the divine energies.

Revealing the human form / of Thy second and awesome coming with Thy glory, O Savior, / Thou wast transfigured on Mount Tabor. / Elijah and Moses conversed with Thee, / and Thy three disciples were summoned to behold Thy glory, O Master, / and marveled at Thy radiance. // O Thou Who then shone forth Thy light upon them, illumine our souls! (Matins, First sessional Hymn, Tone 4)

ANSWER 10 St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), was an Athonite ascetic who became Archbishop of Thessalonica. The second Sunday of Great Lent is dedicated to him.

St. Gregory successfully fought against a prevailing heresy of his day which denied the possibility of ever experiencing or knowing God - in a way surpassing the knowledge of the mind. Adherents of this heresy claimed that in this life one could only know about God.

St. Gregory made a distinction between the divine essence of God, which remains inaccessible to men, and the divine energies, such as the light of transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, which are uncreated but accessible to human vision. [also manifested in the countenance of the Prophet Moses after descending the mountain, and by Saint Seraphim during his conversation with Motovilov, etc...] From his own mystical experience, St. Gregory defended the possibility of attaining true union with God, which is, in fact, the aim of all Christian endeavor: "The kingdom of God lies within" (Luke 17:21). This is the essence of the teaching called hesychasm which advocates the constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer and quieting of both soul and body in order that the prayer might act to warm the heart with unceasing remembrance and burning love for God.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

In the very Name of Jesus, a great and graceful power is present. Many holy and righteous people advise repeating the Jesus Prayer (also known as the Prayer of the Heart) as frequently as possible. The Hesychasts, who practiced the Jesus Prayer unceasingly, were defended by St. Gregory Palamas in two Councils that met in Constantinople in 1341 and 1347.

St. Gregory Palamas upheld a doctrine of man which allowed for the use of bodily exercises in prayer. He also argued, against the heretic Barlaam, that it was possible for man to experience God's energies as Uncreated Light - identical with the Divine and Uncreated Light of Tabor which the three disciples saw surrounding Jesus at His Transfiguration.

St. Gregory said, "If in the age to come the body will share with the soul in unspeakable blessings, it is certain that it must share in them, so far as possible, even now." Indeed, even in this present life some saints have experienced the first-fruits of this visible and bodily glorification. Saint Seraphim of Sarov is perhaps the best known, but by no means the only instance of this.

"When God is said to have made man according to His image, the word man means neither the soul by itself nor the body by itself, but the two together." The fact that man has a body, Gregory said, makes him not lower but higher than the bodiless angels. The Orthodox belief is that the body is sanctified and transfigured together with the soul. This is the reason we have such an immense reverence for the relics of saints.

To overcome the passions which enslave us, we need to transform our hearts which are darkened by sin. The Church gives us what we need to perform this task. During the Great Fast we follow the Church's Lenten prescription. This prepares us to receive the spiritual instruction offered each week.

St. Gregory Palamas, shows us clearly by his whole life that the Christian life, Orthodox life, always begins in our heart, and only then expresses itself externally in feats of asceticism. St. Gregory helps us to understand the importance of prayer. Prayer is what we need more than anything - true, fervent, real prayer - heartfelt prayer.

The triumph of Orthodoxy always starts in a person's heart, and only afterwards is it expressed externally. True, sometimes there are cases when the external attracts the heart, as if waking it up. But for this to happen, there must be something in the heart which makes such an awakening possible. God demands our heart. To serve God without heart, Orthodoxy without heart, this is the same as a man without heart.

Thanks to Fr Mark Gilstrap. All of the preceding is from a post written by him, to the Orthodox "Indiana" mailing list, on 16 Mar 1995. The text has been slightly rearranged.

http://www.orthodox.net/questions/transfiguration_1.html

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ⁱ Exodus 33:11-23; 34:4-6, 8, read as the second of three readings (also called "Parables") at Vespers for the Transfiguration. Here is an excerpt: "20 And again he said: Thou canst not see my face: for man shall not see me and live. 21 And again he said: Behold there is a place with me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock. 22 And when my glory shall pass, I will set thee in a hole of the rock, and protect thee with my right hand, till I pass: 23 And I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face thou canst not see"

ⁱⁱ 2 Peter 1:10-19, read at the Liturgy on the Transfiguration.