

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

LECTIONARY #614

READING I Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14

A reading from the book of the Prophet Daniel.

As I watched:

Thrones were set up
and the **Ancient One** took his throne.
His **clothing** was **bright** as **snow**,
and the **hair** on his **head** as **white** as **wool**;
His **throne** was **flames** of **fire**,
with **wheels** of **burning** fire.
A **surging** stream of fire
flowed out from where he sat;
Thousands upon **thousands** were **ministering** to him,
and **myriads** upon **myriads** attended him.
The **court** was **convened** and the **books** were **opened**.

As the visions during the night continued, I saw:

One like a **Son** of **man** coming,
on the **clouds** of **heaven**;
when he **reached** the **Ancient One**
and was **presented** before him,
the **one** like a **Son** of **man** received **dominion**, **glory**,
and **kingship**;
all **peoples**, **nations**, and **languages** serve him.
His **dominion** is an everlasting **dominion**
that shall **not** be **taken** away,
his **kingship** shall **not** be **destroyed**.

A powerful, visionary reading that is a thrill to proclaim. The images are so vivid and the language so exciting and strange, be careful not to get carried away. Proclaim in a firm and steady voice and let the contents of the reading come through in your clarity.

myriads = MEER-ee-uhdz (a large amount/countless)

The focus of the reading shifts with this new vision of Daniel's, one that foretells the coming of Jesus, lending this vision a special power.

READING I In the verses preceding today's reading, the prophet receives a vision of four great beasts that emerge from the sea, which are thought to represent four great empires in succession: the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks. Each beast has a number of horns that represent kings associated with that dynasty. As Daniel's vision continues, a tiny horn sprouts on the fourth beast, replacing three of its ten horns. This is the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was notorious for his violence and who launched a persecution

of the Jews in mid-second century bc. He took the name "Epiphanes" which means "god manifest," but his eccentric behavior earned him the name Epimanes, meaning "the mad one," among his contemporaries.

This background about Antiochus IV is important for understanding today's reading because it explains the expansiveness and elegance of Daniel's vision of God's throne room. The "Ancient One" is God, and the details of his appearance speak to his divine status of wisdom and purity. The throne and river of fire suggest God's supremacy over cosmic phenomena. Daniel

sees that God has so many court ministers and such a large number of subjects that it was impossible to count them. So much for Antiochus claiming to be Epiphanes, "god manifest!" In contrast to Antiochus' tiny horn with eyes and a mouth (Daniel 7:8), the Ancient One is what a real God looks like! Also, in contrast to whatever power Antiochus IV might have, there is "one like a Son of man," or someone in human form, who is presented before the Ancient One to receive "dominion, glory, and kingship" from God. Moreover, his kingship will last forever. Most likely Daniel understood this

RESPONSORIAL Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 9 (1a, 9a)

R. The Lord is king, the Most High over all the earth.

The LORD is king; let the earth rejoice;
let the many islands be glad.
Clouds and darkness are round about him,
justice and judgment are the foundation
of his throne.

The mountains melt like wax before
the LORD,
before the LORD of all the earth.
The heavens proclaim his justice,
all peoples see his glory.

Because you, O LORD, are the Most High
over all the earth,
exalted far above all gods.

READING II 2 Peter 1:16–19

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Peter

Beloved:

We did not follow cleverly devised myths

when we made **known** to you
the **power and coming** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**,
but we had been **eyewitnesses** of his **majesty**.

For he received **honor and glory** from **God the Father**
when that **unique declaration came** to him from the
majestic glory,

“This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven
while we were **with him** on the holy **mountain**.

Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is
altogether reliable.

You will **do well** to be **attentive** to it,
as to a **lamp shining in a dark place**,

until **day dawns** and the **morning star rises** in your **hearts**.

Even emphasis on “did not follow cleverly devised myths,” with a slight pause between “follow” and “cleverly.”

Slight pauses between “ourselves” and “heard,” and between “voice” and “come.”

Slight pause between “star” and “rises.”

one like a son of man to be a representative of God’s chosen people (see Daniel 7:18) or Israel’s messiah. Early Christians associated this text with Jesus, and the Gospels use Son of Man as a title for Jesus though the origin of that title is unclear.

READING II Our second reading is from the Second Letter of Peter. Although attributed to Peter, this work is most likely pseudonymous, written in approximately AD 100–125, by a disciple or admirer of Peter to keep his memory alive some forty to fifty years after his martyrdom.

One of the topics that this document addresses is the delay of the parousia, the return of Christ at the end time. Because resurrection from the dead was one of the signs of the end time, the earliest Christians believed that the Christ’s return would happen very soon. In fact, Paul thought it would be within his lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Now, some seventy to ninety years after Jesus’ resurrection, early Christians were still waiting for the parousia. The reference to “cleverly devised myths” appears to be a response to an accusation that was leveled against people who made up stories about

rewards and punishment in the end time in order to control people’s behavior. This writer asserts that he does not spout such myths. Rather, writing as if he were Peter, he declares that he actually witnessed Jesus’ prophecy about the end time in the power and glory of his transfigured appearance and in the voice from heaven. This prophecy we can rely on, he says.

GOSPEL The story of Jesus’ transfiguration on a high mountain is included in all three of the synoptic Gospels. The mountain that provides the

GOSPEL Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother, John,
and led them up a **high mountain by themselves**.
And he was **transfigured before them**;
his face shone like the sun
and his **clothes became white as light**.
And **behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them,**
conversing with him.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,
"Lord, it is good that we are here.
If you wish, I will make **three tents** here,
one for **you**, one for **Moses**, and one for **Elijah**."
While he was **still speaking, behold,**
a **bright cloud** cast a **shadow** over them,
then from the cloud came a voice that said,
"**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;**
listen to him."
When the **disciples heard this, they fell prostrate**
and were **very much afraid**.
But Jesus came and **touched them, saying,**
"**Rise, and do not be afraid.**"
And when the disciples **raised their eyes,**
they saw **no one else but Jesus alone**.
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.**"

"Transfigured" focuses this reading, sets its tone. This is a celestial event.

Moses = MOH-zihz or MOH-zihz

Elijah = ee-Lī-juh

Initially, the appearance of Moses and Elijah intensifies the focus.

But then Peter humanizes things in his desire to set up a shrine.

At "behold," the focus shifts back to a heavenly perspective that overwhelms the earthly perspective.

Even emphasis on "very much afraid."

The mystery of this final command of Jesus is worth lingering over as you conclude your proclamation.

setting for this story is unnamed, but tradition has identified it with Mount Tabor, though Mount Carmel or Mount Hermon is also a possibility. However, the precise location does not matter. More important to know is that ancient peoples believed mountains to be the site of divine revelations. Jesus is radiant with light, which is how ancients would have understood a divine presence. Moses and Elijah, who appear with Jesus, represent the Law and the Prophets, respectively.

Though this is a familiar story, there are several things that we can learn anew

in this reading of it. Peter's desire to put up tents for the three heavenly beings suggests the Feast of Tabernacles, which is a commemoration of the giving of the Law on Sinai and an anticipation of the coming reign of God at the end time. The tents are a reminder of the forty years living in temporary dwellings in the wilderness. Today, this Jewish feast is usually celebrated at the end of September.

God's voice from heaven announcing that Jesus is God's beloved Son is similar to the words that came from heaven at Jesus' baptism (see Matthew 3:13-17), except that

now the words are addressed to the disciples. Only Matthew includes the detail about the disciples bowing down in fear and adoration. But their fear is reasonable, because many ancient peoples believed that humans could not see God face to face and remain alive. Matthew has Jesus describe this event as a vision, suggesting that it symbolizes an event that will happen later, though it can be helpful to remember that the Gospel was written after the resurrection of Jesus and with the after-the-fact insight that goes with the experience. C.C.