



# LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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## KNOWING JESUS THROUGH THE LUMINOUS MYSTERIES, PART THREE: THE TRANSFIGURATION

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

Our Lord says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) When we pray and enter into the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, they reveal to us who Jesus Christ is, what he came here for, and how as the Light of the world he is meant to shine in our hearts.

The task of each Christian is to make a special place for God in their heart. If we want the glory of heaven and eternal life with Our Lord in his kingdom, we have to be willing to do the work here on earth. Thus, even though Jesus' victory over sin and death is complete, we who are in this world have the stark reminder that we still face darkness in our lives and can choose the sinful path that leads away from the kingdom. That's why the *daily* struggle to follow Christ is so important. For those who engage in that struggle, St. Paul says, "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18)

Pope St. John Paul II said that the Luminous Mystery *par excellence* is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor.<sup>1</sup> In this great event, "Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, 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." (Matthew 17:1-2)

As the vision on Mount Tabor continues, the disciples see Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah, revealing to us that he is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets of which they symbolize, and that the Way of the Cross as foreshadowed in the Old Testament is the way to his glory. In fact, St. Luke tells us that they "spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31) Thus,

just as Moses led the Israelites out of their slavery in the desert, Jesus will lead us out of our slavery to sin and death through his Passion!

In the Fourth Mystery of Light then, we learn two key themes that teach us much about Jesus and the way his life on earth impacts our own: that the Cross is the way to glory, and that, according to the Father, we need to heed the voice of Christ who is the light that shines in our hearts and lights our path.



Just prior to the Transfiguration, Our Lord prophesies to his disciples that he will suffer greatly at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be put to death, and then be raised up on the third day. (Cf. Matthew 16:21) He then imparts to his disciples the very difficult teaching that "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

After presenting this challenging doctrine of the cross, Jesus takes his disciples to a mountaintop where he gives them a majestic vision of his glory, a foreshadowing of himself in the kingdom of heaven.

There is a great paradox here. How are we to view these two very disparate mysteries in the life of Jesus? First, he tells his disciples that he will be put to death—and that *they* too must follow him to the cross. Then, he takes them up the mountain where they witness a glorious vision of Jesus as his face changes in appearance while he is praying, and his clothes become dazzling white. (Cf. Luke 9:29) How does the ugliness and horror of the Cross with its evil, death and sin correlate to the glory of the Transfigured Christ, the prefigurement of the Resurrected Christ?

What helps us understand this "mystery" between the Cross and the Resurrection is Jesus' own words to the two travelers on the road to Emmaus, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things [his Passion] and

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Listening for the Voice of the Good Shepherd

By Fr. Bartholomew Hutcherson, O.P.

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"I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me ... My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me..." (John 10:14 and 27)

Jesus spoke these words to Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. They served as both a critique of the leadership of those authorities (whom he compared to hired-men who had no care for the sheep), and as comfort and instruction to those who were looking for the Messiah, an alternative shepherd.

Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises which envision the Messiah in pastoral terms. Who would not want to follow the shepherd of Psalm 23 who accompanies us through the valley of darkness, and prepares a banquet in the face of enemies? Or to follow a Jeremiah's shepherd who relieves fears and terror (Jeremiah 23:4)? The Messianic promises of ancient Israel are replete with images of the Good shepherd, which the Ancient Church then applies to Jesus in sacred writings and art.

I wish to focus on a single aspect of the Good Shepherd metaphor in John 10 that I believe is essential in constructing and living our Christian life in the 21st Century: the voice of the Good Shepherd. Jesus told the crowd listening to him that his sheep know his voice and would follow him, rather than a stranger's voice they do not recognize. Vital to the most basic following of Jesus is the recognition of his voice, and distinguishing his voice from all those that would lead us in other directions. Today, we live in a world with so much noise that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the voice of Jesus among all other voices. I believe that this is by design. Even Jesus himself warned us: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15)

### VOICES CONTRARY TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Even in Jesus' own time, he had to contend with voices of opposition, especially from Israel's religious leaders. Today there are certainly voices that are openly hostile to anything remotely related to Jesus. Those are perhaps the easiest distractions to discern and overcome. The more subtle voices can be more difficult to discern. For example, in recent weeks, I have been more attentive to the news media than normal. The reality of a global pandemic and social unrest have piqued my interest and I find myself both actively and passively consuming media. There was a moment last week when I

realized this was not only cutting into time I might normally spend praying or studying, but it was also distracting *when* I was praying or studying. Certainly, there is no evil in staying informed of current affairs, but the pervasive and negative nature of modern news media can be both psychologically and spiritually damaging if we are not careful.

The goods we enjoy as part of our lives—our work, possessions, food, festivities, even our relationships—can become so powerful that they drown out the voice of the Good Shepherd. Any of these good things can become overwhelming, such that we lose perspective and the temperance that orders these things to living well. In the worst cases, the balance can become greatly distorted, and we find ourselves addicted to voices calling to our worst selves, rather than our best.

Then, of course, there are the *evil* voices which can distract us. They compete with the voice of the Good Shepherd, leading us from his path into sinful behaviors which are destructive of our bodies and souls. They call us to join other flocks which lead only to our being consumed. These voices are like those of which Jeremiah spoke: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for wild animals." (34:2b-5) The Good Shepherd wants to help us avoid this fate by listening to his voice and belonging to his flock.

### DISCERNING THE GOOD SHEPHERD'S VOICE

It stands to reason the more time I spend in conversation with another person, the more I will come to know and recognize his voice. I am more likely to recognize the voice of a sibling, roommate, or colleague than that of a stranger or acquaintance. The same is true in our relationship with the Good Shepherd. The more I spend time with him in conversation, the more likely I will be able to pick out his voice among the noise. In many ways the following are basic suggestions for spiritual growth: develop a private prayer life, participate in the life of the Church, study, spend time with other Christians, surround yourselves with reminders of the Lord's voice, invoke the Holy Spirit and read the Scriptures. I will touch on all these suggested tools of spiritual growth, but I really want to focus on two: staying close to the Church and devouring the Scriptures.

"Staying close to the Church" is fundamental to drawing closer to the Good Shepherd and recognizing his voice. John 10 says that the Good Shepherd calls us by name, and we follow him. He leads us out of the sheepfold as we go out to find pasture. The Church itself can represent both sheepfold (Jesus says that he himself is the gate to the sheepfold) and pasture. It is pasture in that it is the place that we find nourishment for our life as disciples, especially in the

Sacraments. For example, baptism makes us part of his flock, the Eucharist nourishes and strengthens us to follow him, and by Reconciliation our wounds are bound up and healed.

As sheepfold, the Church is a place of refuge. As such, the Church helps us to hear and recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd through association with other disciples, usually called "fellowship." Our brothers and sisters in Christ help us to discern the directions in which the Good Shepherd invites us to walk. This pilgrimage is best walked in the company of other believers who can help us authenticate the voice of Jesus. Christian friends support us when we struggle on the journey and help us to correct our course when we have lost our way.

As a place of refuge, the Church also helps us to grow as disciples. It offers opportunities to study and pray, both of which help us to grow in familiarity with the voice of the Lord. Staying close to the Church helps us discern when the wolves in sheep's clothing try to snatch us away from the flock of the Good Shepherd. The Holy Spirit was given to the Church as teacher and animator for the faithful. The Holy Spirit also guides the Church and helps her remain faithful in her teachings and practices. The Good Shepherd also left a vicar to keep us united as a flock. The Holy Spirit is at work in an extraordinary way in the Vicar of Christ. One way we can be sure that we are listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd is by remaining in union with the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on Earth, and the magisterium.

Above all, we always know that there is one place we can hear the voice of the Good Shepherd: Sacred Scripture. We, as Church, hold that "the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself," and that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation." (*Dei Verbum* 11) Knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures is essential to following the Good Shepherd. St. Jerome famously warned: "Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." The converse is also logical: To know Christ, know the Scriptures. We call the Bible "God's Word," and we know we will encounter that Word when we read and study the Bible. Scripture study is literally an exercise in hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. These timeless texts, written in human language, prepare us to hear and follow their true author, God himself. St. Paul told his young protégé: "All scripture is inspired by God (literally *God-breathed*) and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The more familiar we are with the sacred text, the more we will be able to discern Jesus' voice.

Finally, we should not expect the voice of the Good Shepherd to always be the loudest. Sometimes we need to get quiet to hear his voice. The Prophet Elijah experienced this on Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:11-13). God sent him to a cave to wait. Elijah knew God would pass by. As he waited for God, there were three natural events: a fire, an earthquake and a mighty windstorm, all of which, in other times and places, portended the presence and power of God. But Elijah knew the voice of God well enough to know that God was not present in those events. Afterwards, there was a  
(Continued on page 4)

## What Would Mary Say?

By Fr. Bartholomew Hutcherson, O.P.

I have written a longer piece in this issue about the importance of recognizing the voice of the Good Shepherd among all the noise of the world, so that we might more closely follow him. This, of course, is a concern of our Blessed Mother, who was Jesus' first disciple, and who always points us to the following of her son. "Do whatever he tells you," the Blessed Mother says to the servers at the wedding at Cana (John 2:5). These are the instructions of the Mother of the Church for all her children. And she herself desires to help us do whatever he tells us. In the Rosary, our Mother has given us an excellent tool to help us grow in our desire and ability to hear the voice of her son, the Good Shepherd. Is there any more perfect "school of spirituality" than the Rosary? It is a perfect confluence of scripture, prayer, and meditation. To plumb the depths of any one of the Sacred Mysteries is to draw closer to the Lord and to be formed more perfectly into his disciple. To be lost in the repetition of the verbal prayers and the tactile experience of the beads is to exercise trust that the Good Shepherd himself is guiding us on a path of deeper knowledge and a deeper love represented in the mysteries themselves.

The habitual meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary will lead us to a more profound familiarity with the events they signify, and with the life of the Good Shepherd himself. The more we visit those mysteries, the more we will come to experience them as though we are present with Jesus and Mary in their actual occurrence. Our Lord and Our Lady lead us, through the Rosary, to participate in and to experience the Joy, the Light, the Sorrow and the Glory that make up the life of the Incarnate Son of God. The more we pray the Rosary, meditating on the events taken from the Scriptures and life of Jesus and Mary, the more we grow in our understanding of the saving mysteries of Jesus Christ. The more we tie those Mysteries to the historical events and the Sacred Texts which tell their story, the more our Blessed Mother leads us to the Good Shepherd. As his followers, we come to experience his Joy, Light, Sorrow and Glory of the Lord as our own. Let us ask our Blessed Mother to help us, through the Rosary, to grow in the grace of her Divine Son, the Good Shepherd, that we might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10) ■

NOVEMBER

MONTH OF THE HOLY SOULS

The Rosary Center will offer a novena of Masses for the dead, beginning on All Souls Day, November 2. Prayer for the dead is a hallowed tradition, and we can offer no greater tribute to our loved ones than to pray for the happy repose of their souls. We ask you to join your prayers with ours as we pray for those who have died and to share with us the names of those you wish us to remember during these Masses. Please return your list of names to us before November 1st.

**...Voice of the Good Shepherd** (Continued from page 3)

“gentle whisper,” and Elijah hid his face because God was in the silence. Sometimes, we just need to turn off the noise around us and get silent, listening for the voice of the Good Shepherd in the depths of our hearts. When we learn to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, he promises to lead us to more abundant life (John 10:10).■

**... The Transfiguration** (Continued from page 1)

enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26) In this regard, St. Thomas Aquinas affirms that by his Passion, Jesus achieved glory, not only of his soul (which he had from the first moment of his conception) but also of his body.<sup>2</sup> Further, St. Thomas directs us, as always, to the ultimate goal of our lives as Christians when he calls to mind Acts 14:22: “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>3</sup> So, if we are to answer Jesus’ call to follow in his footsteps, we will face the hardships of this life, but by his grace we will reach heaven.

In the final scene of the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John are overshadowed by a bright cloud as the glory of the Father shines forth from the human face of Christ—and they hear His command, “Listen to him” (Matthew 17:5). Thus, they were being prepared to experience with Jesus the agony of his Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of his Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

As we pray this mystery, we should put ourselves on that mountaintop with Peter, James, and John because the words of the Father—“Listen to him”—are also meant for us. In fact, in these words one can see a correlation between *all five* of the Luminous Mysteries.

In the First Luminous Mystery, Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan, St. Thomas teaches that the mystery of the first regeneration—our baptism—is proclaimed, where the Holy Trinity is made manifest in the presence of the Incarnate Son, the Holy Spirit appearing under the form of a dove, while the Father is making Himself known in the voice that is proclaiming, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Likewise, in the Transfiguration, where the mystery of the second regeneration—our future resurrection from the dead—is proclaimed, the Holy Trinity appears again: Jesus is present, the Holy Spirit is present in the bright cloud, and the Father speaks, instructing us to “Listen to him.”<sup>5</sup> So, as we die and rise in Christ in our baptism, and enter into the Passion of Christ through the cross, so we will reach the glory of heaven in the resurrection from the dead.

In the Second Luminous Mystery, though the Blessed Virgin Mary was not present at the Transfiguration, the role she assumed at Cana in some way accompanies Christ throughout his ministry.<sup>6</sup> Pope St. John Paul II says the words spoken by the Father at the Transfiguration are “placed upon Mary’s lips at Cana, and it becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age: ‘Do whatever he tells you’ (John 2:5). This counsel is a fitting introduction to the words and signs of Christ’s public ministry, and it forms the Marian foundation of all the ‘mysteries of light.’”<sup>7</sup>

In the Third Luminous Mystery, the Proclamation of the Coming of the Kingdom of God and the Call to Conversion, Jesus proclaims, “The kingdom of God is at hand—repent,

and believe in the Gospel!” In this mystery, the words of the Father echo in the background, “Listen to him.” The call of Jesus means that every Christian who professes faith in Jesus Christ must be open to ongoing conversion, which will mean undergoing our own experience of the Passion by dying to ourselves while keeping our eyes on the road that leads to our resurrection.

In the Fifth Luminous Mystery, the Institution of the Holy Eucharist, the words of the Father once again call us to listen to the directive of Jesus when at the Last Supper, he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19)

As we reflect upon the Mystery of the Transfiguration, we call to mind St. Peter’s testimony of that sacred event, “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.” (2 Peter 1:16-18)

Thus, after Peter witnessed the appearance of Moses and Elijah as they conversed with Jesus, we recall his own words, “It is good Lord to be here” as we ourselves go to that place where we encounter the risen Christ—in our own hearts. “Therefore, since each of us possesses God in his heart and is being transformed into his divine image, we also should cry out with joy: *It is good for us to be here*—here where all things shine with divine radiance, where there is joy and gladness and exultation; where there is nothing in our hearts but peace, serenity and stillness; where God is seen. For here, in our hearts, Christ takes up his abode together with the Father . . . . With Christ, our hearts receive all the wealth of his eternal blessings, and there where they are stored up for us in him, we see reflected as in a mirror both the first fruits and the whole of the world to come,”<sup>8</sup> “for God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Christ.” (2 Cor 4:5-6)

In conclusion, the Transfiguration gives us a foretaste of Christ’s glorious coming, when he “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” (Phil 3:21)<sup>9</sup> We too are meant to be united with Christ in all things, beginning with our baptism, then passing through his Passion in order to share in the glory of his Resurrection. And if we walk that hallowed road, and heed the voice of Jesus—as directed by the Father—which says, “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” we too will find our lives transfigured by the Holy Spirit.■

1. Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, #21.

2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.45.1.

3. *Ibid*

4. Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, #21

5. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.45.4. ad 2.

6. Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, #21

7. *Ibid*

8. Anastasius of Sinai, (Nn. 6-10: *Melanges d’archeologie et d’histoire* 67 [1955], 241-244)

9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #556