

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2023
THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRANSFIGURATION**

Matthew 17: 1-9

“GOD MAKES MOSES’ WISHES COME TRUE”

Today, on Holy Transfiguration Day, we remember the day when, not long before His death and resurrection, our Lord’s divinity was clearly revealed. He took 3 of His Disciples---Peter, James, and John---up on a mountain top and there His divinity was clearly revealed. He was transfigured---His divinity was apparent as He shone with the light of God. In our gospel reading from Matthew 17, we read in verse 2 that Jesus’ face “was like the sun”. That is bright! That was the very light of God. It was a way of letting the disciples know that He was truly divine.

Besides Peter, James, and John there were 2 other witnesses to the divine light on the mountain that day---the two prophets Moses and Elias (Elijah). God sent them from the next life to the mountain to worship Jesus Christ as God in this world.

Our focus in the sermon today will be on what happened to St. Moses.....

Moses was the great, great man of God. It was through him that God freed the Israelites from being slaves to the wicked Pharaoh in Egypt. Moses led them through the Red Sea, through 40 years in the Sinai wilderness, and brought them to the Promised Land. He performed many, many miracles in his many years of leading them. He received the Law, including the 10 Commandments, from God. On and on we could go about his life-----truly one of the greatest, most powerful, and holiest men who ever lived!

Moses had 2 special wishes, however, that God did not give him. One wish was to enter the Promised Land along with the people at end of their 40 years in the desert. The second wish was to see God. God denied Moses both of these wishes.

Why was the first wish---to enter the Promised Land---denied by God? Because one day St. Moses gave in to the sin of anger. He lost his temper and had a temper tantrum. And when anger gets out of control, it can have very serious consequences!

Back in 1894, the Baltimore Orioles went to Boston to play the Red Sox.

Many, many Baltimore fans went up to Boston to the game as the two teams back then had a strong rivalry. During the game, Baltimore's John McGraw got into an argument with the Red Sox third baseman over a play at third. The hot words led to shoving and hitting. Then a bench-clearing brawl began as both teams' players ran out on the field to fight. Then the fans joined in and fist fights between Oriole fans and Red Sox fans broke out all over the stadium. One of the Baltimore fellows managed to set some bleachers on fire and soon the stadium was burning down. The flames spread into the neighborhood, causing 107 buildings in Boston to go up in smoke that day. ("Our Daily Bread", 8/13/93)

Yes, anger can have very bad results! It sure did for Moses.

The story is in Numbers 20. It happened during the Hebrews' 40 years in the desert. They were in an area called Zin where there was hardly any water. They were thirsty—and they started complaining strongly to Moses. Their whining message to him was that he should have left them in Egypt—at least they had water to drink there. Moses got very angry at them, but God intervened to help the situation. He gave Moses a specific directive---to take his staff, to assemble the people in front of a large rock, and then to tell the rock to give forth water for the people. So Moses took his staff, gathered all the people in front of the rock..... But instead of telling the rock to give water, he lost his temper and in a fit of anger smacked the rock twice with his staff. God, in His mercy, still had the water flow even though Moses had angrily disobeyed.

But Moses was punished for his anger and disobedience. In Numbers 20:i 2, we read what God said to Moses---“you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given you.” This was a severe punishment. The people would get to go into the promised land. But Moses, who led them for 40 years, would not get to go in. His great wish, to enter Canaan, would not be granted! And that punishment came true. Not too long after, Moses died right by the boundary of the promised land. Joshua took over the leadership and led the Israelites in---Moses didn't go in.

Moses' second great wish was to see the face of God. In Exodus 33:18, he says to God---“I pray Thee, show me Thy glory.” God would not fully grant that wish---He would allow Moses only to have a partial glimpse of God's glory. He told Moses in verse 23---“you shall see my back, but My face shall not be seen.” It's a mystery what that exactly means, but it seems Moses got a *glimpse* of the glory of God, but no more.

So neither of Moses' great wishes were granted to him. He did not get to enter the promised land and he did not get to see the face of God. But.....on the day we celebrate today, Transfiguration Day, both wishes finally came true for him!

As Christ was transfigured on the mountain, God sent Moses there from the next world. And both wishes were finally granted.

First, the mountain most definitely was in the promised land—which means Moses' great wish to enter that land happened that day. He stood in the promised land to worship the Son of God. A delay of many hundreds of years, but he finally made it in!

Second, and really more wonderful. He finally saw God's face which God would not grant him before. On the mountain he saw the face of Jesus shining with the divine light, shining "like the sun" as St. Matthew put it in our gospel reading. When Moses saw Jesus' face, he was seeing the face of God, for Christ is God.

Back in the wilderness of Zin, Moses sinned in anger. God punished him. God forgave him. And later, God granted his two special wishes.

The point of all this is that God is good. He is merciful. And He wants to grant us our wishes if they are godly wishes. What are your big wishes in life? A nicer place to live, prosperity, popularity, good health? All not very important in the eyes of God. He wants you to have better things than that! If you have better wishes than those, if you have wishes similar to those of Moses-----and if you make those better wishes truly central in your life, God will give them to you. Even if you sometimes mess up along the way like Moses did!

So may we all make Moses' wishes *our* wishes---not just fanciful whims, but wishes that determine how we live and who we really are.

Wish number one that we should have—to enter the promised land. Not the physical promised land in Palestine, but the true Promised Land of heaven. Dedicate your whole life to entering that divine land----and you will go there!

Wish number two that we should have----to see God. Truly live focused on that wish---and God will grant it! For then, one day in the life to come, you will see the face of God, because you will see the face of Jesus Christ, who is truly God.

Like Moses, we have sinned. But, if we truly repent, God will forgive us

like He forgave Moses. And He will grant our holy wishes.

So don't mess around in life focused on wishes that aren't worth all that much, and will be of no value at all on our day of death. As we die, will we rejoice that we had a really great car and lots of friends? I doubt it!

Instead, have wishes like Moses did---to enter God's heavenly Promised Land and to see God. Live totally for the fulfillment of those wishes. Those are wishes worth living for! And then God will give them to you like He did for Moses.