

Sermons on the Transfiguration of the Lord

Peter of Celle

Translated by Brandon P. Otto

Introduction

Peter (also known as Peter Cellensis) was born of noble parentage in Champagne, France, in the first half of the 12th century. He was educated at the Monastery of St. Martin-des-Champs in Paris before he became a Benedictine. In 1150, he was named abbot of the Abbey of La Celle, near Troyes. He was later made abbot of the Abbey of St. Rémy at Rheims, in 1162, and in 1181, he became Bishop of Chartres, succeeding John of Salisbury. He died a few years later, on February 20, 1183. Peter wrote many epistles and sermons, as well as a few treatises, including *On Conscience*, *On the Discipline of the Cloister*, and an explanation of the Mosaic tabernacle.

Source: J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 202:840A-848C.

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Sermon 65
On the Transfiguration of the Lord I

Like the eagle provoking its chicks to fly, etc. (Dt 32:11).

Having made mention of His passion, lest the faith of the apostles—unto now middling and tender, like a mustard seed—be crushed by a heap and by such burdensome heaps, Jesus overcame sorrow with consolation, overcame sickness with remedy, overcame a bitter thing with sweetness, overcame, finally, the foulest death of the Cross with the glorious Transfiguration. Indeed, the laborers are worthy of compensation (Lk 10:7), and everyone weighs it on the just balance of equity, the labor as much as the reward of the work, so that what is expended and what is demanded would run with equal steps, by diverse ways, yet they seek one crossroads.

Clearly, different things are to honored and despised, glorified and reviled, yet, on one shoulder, Jesus bore both the Cross and the glorification of the Transfiguration; for the same face which shone like the sun in the Transfiguration suffered spittle and blows in the Passion. If the face of the image of the glory of God assumed the sun's splendor, this was not great.¹ But who would not wither away, hearing that the filthiest perfidy of the Jews spat the venom of its breast into the face of God? Who would not block up his ears, not rend asunder his faithful heart? Yet the vestments, which become white as snow,² are taken away and distributed by lot among the soldiers.

O patience of God, that what is scarcely believed worthy of angelic guards, what is most mercifully designated as an incomparable treasury for the Christian people, is handled by the unworthy hands of the crucifiers! But the reason for this truth and variety lies in the mysteries hidden from the world. While the boyhood of faith grows feathers, before it is exposed to the birds of prey, the doctrine of flying is laid down and expounded; for, when the Lord foretold His Passion, after six days, He took Peter and James and John, and He led them onto a high mountain and was transfigured before them (Mt 17:1-2).

Flying away, to the eagle, is the Transfiguration to the Lord; for, as the eagle is raised up to the sun itself by most rapid flight, so the human nature assumed by the Word, most powerfully flying away, at that hour, cast off all mortal impediments from itself, not condemning the clarity of the sun or snow, but dressed in the clarity³ which was in the Word before the world was, at which

1 By "great" here, Peter means "surprising" or "unexpected."

2 Interestingly, though "white as snow" is found in the Vulgate of Mt 17:2, as well as certain versions of the Gospels in Syriac and Bohairic Coptic, it is only found in a single Greek manuscript: the rest of the Greek textual tradition instead reads "white as light." Possibly the "white as snow" reading was adapted from Mt 28:3, where the angel's garment is thus described.

3 In Latin, the word *claritas* can mean either "brightness" or "glory." Throughout this sermon, there is a constant play on words between the brightness associated with the Transfiguration (shining like the sun, vestments white as snow) and the glory that Jesus displayed then. In order to not simplify the double meaning, I've translated *claritas* as "clarity" wherever it appears.

even angels long to peek. For neither could the evangelist express how much the divine power was able to do; he spoke as a man could, in comparison, but God could do much more in operation than the human tongue in relation.

Therefore, the hen led her chicks up to the high mountain, and—not like a hen, but like an eagle—provoked them to fly; for it is for hens to nourish chicks, not to fly; but it is for the eagle to fly, and to provoke to flight. Therefore, Jesus was a hen in the fields, an eagle on the mountains; He taught morals in the fields, He revealed heavenly things on the mountains; He heals the sick in the fields, He teaches the Beatitudes on the mountains. Jacob set down a stone in the fields (Gen 28:11), He erected a ladder on the mountains; He provokes with admiration, He provokes with delight, He provokes with paternal consolation, He provokes with promise, He provokes with compassion, since, if we suffer with Him,⁴ we shall also reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12).

And what does it mean that “He was transfigured,” not “in their presence,” but “before them” (Mt 17:2),⁵ except that He will configure the body of our humility to be configured to the body of His clarity (Phil 3:21), so that we will be transferred from clarity to clarity, as by the Lord’s spirit (2 Cor 3:18)? “Before them” as the head itself, and we, afterwards, as the members. For members follow their head everywhere, be it unto death, be it unto life, whence *He says: He who ministers to Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there too will My minister be* (Jn 12:26).

Then follows the mode of transfiguration, like the single flight of an eagle, and difficult to imitate: *and His face shone like the sun, and His vestments became white as snow* (Mt 17:2); when the eagle grows old, he renews (Ps 103:5); when Jesus, as if fatigued to old age by the troubles of the world, and urged by a desire to finish the course, like Jacob (Gen 31:3), proposes to see his father and fatherland again, He is first transfigured, with face changed into the clarity of the sun, and clothing into the image of snow;⁶ for the face of the old man ceases where the glory of the new approaches—*You shall cast out the old*, says Moses, *when the new come upon you* (Lev 26:10); but Jesus, having taken up the winnowing-fork, began to cleanse His threshing-floor when He changed the tent of Kedar into the curtain of Solomon (Sgs 1:5), that is, the old age of mortality into the glory of the Transfiguration. And since there was nothing artificial in the Transfiguration, therefore, a comparison was taken from the sun, not from any sub-solar image; for who could touch the sun, so that he could exercise some deceptive art upon it? Therefore, it was heavenly that, by divine power alone, the face of Jesus shone like the sun.

4 The Latin word *compassio* (“compassion”) literally means “to suffer with,” and Peter uses the related verb (*compatimur*) here as a pun.

5 Peter is commenting on the odd word choice in the Vulgate of this verse. Instead of using the preposition *coram*, meaning “in the face of,” “in the presence of,” the Vulgate instead uses *ante*, which primarily means “before” in the temporal sense. Peter takes this *ante eos* (“before them”) in a properly temporal sense, so that the Evangelist is referring to the fact that, in the end, we, too, will be transfigured as Jesus was then.

6 If Peter intends to relate Jesus’ transfiguration of His face and garments to some aspect of Jacob’s return to his father and fatherland, perhaps he is thinking of how Jacob had his household and followers wash themselves and change their clothes upon approaching Bethel (Gen 35:2).

In that comparison and this solemn mystery, there hides the fact that the sun always shines when it is not covered by a cloud, yet it retracts its rays when it is overshadowed by a thick and dense cloud; but the ignorance and malice of the Jews formed a thick cloud and a dark blinding, wherefore it is said that *their malice blinded them* (Wis 2:21). Therefore, the blinded dashed against the stone of offense and the rock of scandal, attending to the covering cloud, not the hidden sun, since Isaac grew old, and could not clearly see the present (Gen 27:1), he who most truly prophesied about the future. Jesus overshadowed Himself with the thin and clear cloud of flesh, but His persecutors tripled this by their evil, when, inculcating the devil's venomous hatred and their own depraved sense, twined the triple cord of their own damnation; for they did not see the sun, since fire had fallen upon them (Ps 58:8), since their furor was according to the likeness of the serpent (Ps 58:4), etc.

Certainly, the eagle was well able to fly away, so that in vain is a trap laid right before him, in the eyes of the fletchers, and *he was well able to avoid their snares*, but he inclined towards the bait, which is the will of His Father, wherefore *My food is that I would do the will of My Father* (Jn 4:34); therefore, he preferred to be caught in the trap than to remain fasting and without the bait of obedience. He thinned the old face by fasting for forty days and forty days, that eagle who was to take up the new again in the kingdom of His Father, where He was to drink the new wine with His disciples and to eat the new bread with them (Mt 26:29).

There follows: *And His vestments became white as snow* (Mt 17:2), distinguishing between sun and snow, between face and clothing; for the disciple is not above his master (Mt 10:24); but he will be perfect if he is like his master, not in equality, but in likeness, as snow is not compared to sun by dignity, but by a certain participation in its clarity. For by the face is Christ Himself to be understood, through the vestments, His disciples; and note in this how the eagle provokes his chicks to flight, for the faithful will not be made equal to the Son of God, but they will be glorified with Him; and one is the clarity of the sun, another the clarity of the moon, another the clarity of the stars; for star differs from star in clarity; such will be the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:41-42).

Therefore, He provokes His chicks to flight, not to flying out or flying with, so that they would imitate Him, they who are of His part, in simplicity of life, in passion for the faith, in hope of the glory of the sons of God. For snow is light in regards to simplicity, frigid in regards to passion, clear in regards to resurrection. Compare the Gospel to the song:⁷ *Like an eagle provoking its chicks to fly, and flying above them* (Dt 32:11). *And His face shone like the sun, and His vestments like snow*—what does this mean except that He provokes His chicks to fly and flies above them? *Attend*, He says, hanging on the Cross, *and see if there is sorrow like my sorrow* (Lam 1:12). Behold,

⁷ The passage in Deuteronomy (Dt 32:1-43) that Peter is drawing from is often called “the Song of Moses,” since Scripture itself describes Moses as speaking “the words of a song” (Dt 31:30, 32:44). In the Greek tradition, this song is the second of the Nine Odes drawn from the Old and New Testaments, though, due to its severe nature, it is typically omitted in liturgical use.

He flies above in sorrow. *He will not be compared to the dyed colors of India, gold from Ethiopia will not be equated to Him* (Job 28:16,19).

Behold how He flies above *us* in the splendor of wisdom and the swiftness of virtues; in the song there follows, *He spread out his wings and took them up*, etc. (Dt 32:11). In the Gospel: *And Moses and Elijah appeared, speaking with Him* (Mt 17:3); who brought Moses from death and Elijah from the remotest region⁸ except the eagle, Who spread the wings of His will and power and bore them on His shoulders, that is, by insuperable operations? For He bears everything by the word of His power (Heb 1:3); by that word, with those shoulders, He, therefore, bore Moses and Elijah, so that they would be present at His Transfiguration. There follows: *And, behold, a lightful cloud overshadowed them* (Mt 17:5); perhaps this is that cloud which took Jesus from the eyes of the Apostles (Acts 1:9), them seeing how He is also to come in judgment, according to this: *So He will come, as you saw Him going into heaven* (Acts 1:11).

There follows: *The Lord alone was his leader, and there was no alien God with him* (Dt 32:12); in the Gospel, *And there was a voice from the cloud saying, "This is My Son," etc.* (Mt 17:3). Behold what the Apostle says: *One is the God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in all of us, Who is God, blessed unto the ages* (Eph 4:6, Rom 9:5). For there are not two gods, Father and Son, but one God, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism (Eph 4:5); it was the voice of this Lord, namely, the Father, that came from the cloud, saying: *"This is My Son, this is He Whom the Father signed and sent into the world; this, distinctly, is My Son; for all others are sons by adoption, He, by nature according to divinity, by a union of person according to humanity: this is My Son, beloved by generation, beloved by operation, beloved by death, beloved by resurrection, Who lives and reigns through all the ages of ages."* Amen.

8 Scripture simply says that Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot and seen no more (2 Kgs 2:11-12), not that he died. There was thus a strong tradition claiming that Elijah, along with Enoch, who "walked with God and was seen no more, because God took him" (Gen 5:24), did not die but was to come again. (Thus John could be described as "Elijah who was to come" (Mt 11:14).) One explanation of the "two witnesses" in Rev 11 is that they are Elijah and Enoch, come back at the end of time in order to finally die. It is due to this tradition that Peter says Elijah was brought "from the remotest region" and not, like Moses, "from death."

Sermon 66

On the Transfiguration of the Lord II

We cannot worthily write or say something about Jesus, unless we receive it from Him from Whom is every best giving and every perfect gift, according to the measure of the giving (Jas 1:17, Eph 4:7). Indeed, the Spirit, Who speaks mysteries, proceeds as much from the Father as from Him; He is the scrutator of the ineffable secrets of God (1 Cor 2:10), nor is He oppressed by the majesty in which He equally reigns, without inequality of substance. Therefore, He is present to us, teaching every truth, especially when we speak of Jesus, when we write of Jesus.

Lord Jesus, when, according to the nature of the divinity, there is no change with You, nor shadow of vicissitude (Jas 1:17), You assumed the human condition which, subject to temporality and vanity, in no way excepts the lot of mutability, but runs in time and with time, in according with the order of nature, wherefore this *is said: The boy Jesus grew in age and wisdom before God and men* (Lk 2:52). In this, therefore, and according to this nature, the spouse of the Church, whose belly is ivory, distinguished with sapphires (Sgs 5:14), made distinction, not only by preaching with lips, but also by performing actions in accord with the threads of eternity, about what and when He would speak, what and when He would act, so that He would not only submit to human troubles, but also keep to the plan of the paternal and perpetual edict and the eternal decree, wherefore He says in the Gospel: *As the Father gave command to me, so do I act* (Jn 14:31).

Therefore, so that the devotion of His faithful would not abhor a nearly unbelievable thing, He willed to suffer the things sufferable to man, wherefore He was recognized as a man; He performed signs and miracles *which*, as Nicodemus said, *no one could do, unless God were with him* (Jn 3:2). Not just through grace, because of the man, but also through nature, because of the divinity, so that God would be believed. But more evident and more beautiful signs of humanity appeared more rarely, even in the face of the foolish; those which indubitably asserted God scarcely touched the disciples' hearts. Without a doubt, the newness of the mystery of the incarnate Word hindered the world from believing what had not been heard from the ages (Is 64:4), what human reason did not comprehend, what neither use nor custom had ever approved, namely, that God became man.

Occasionally shining through, a ray of Divinity excited the inertial torpor of the Jews, but did not strike them; it animated the disciples' vigilance, but, the height of the matter stupefying *them*, sometimes it turned them back from the strength of faith for a while, in such a way that they frequently heard: "Little in faith, why do you doubt?" Again, *Thus far, and are you still without intellect* (Mt 15:16)? Therefore, along the mixed course of apostolic stability and instability, while the time of the passion was approaching, so that He would disperse every fog of doubt, He took Peter and James and John, and He ascended a high mountain, where He was transfigured before them (Mt 17:1-2).

Most strong and unconquerable is this argument for the Christian faith, that under the veil of flesh hid the power of divinity, and, again, He Who appeared outwardly as a man was God, which, being hidden within, did not appear. For neither in this moment of the Transfiguration did the apostles see the substance of divinity, but, by a holy pre-libation, through the medical art, they pre-tasted the flesh which was, a little later, to be glorified by the perpetual resurrection, so that, by the strength of this meal, they would not fall away until the mount of God, Horeb, that is, in the resurrection, in which, according to the interpretation of this name,⁹ mortality as well as all possibility was dried up in Christ; for *Christ arising from the dead now does not die* (Rom 6:9), etc.

Rightly honored by Christians is this holy and radiant solemnity, upon which faith presses like a footprint, which *faith*, even if it did not perilously waver, yet did not provide deep roots. Indeed, it came forth beforehand in the baptism of John, where the Spirit was seen in the image of a dove, the Father likewise heard in voice, *This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him* (Mt 3:47)—a certain emulation of this most beautiful Transfiguration.

Truly, by the shadow of the Sacrament, that *event* is more fruitful, because of the mystery of our regeneration, which began then; this one, higher by beauty and stronger by the attestation of witnesses; for the testimony of one is far weaker than that of five or three: John alone heard and saw that one. Peter and James and John, with Moses and Elijah, were present here, and they are apt witnesses. There, neither the flesh nor face of Jesus changed its appearance; here, His face shone like the sun, beyond the sight of man; that one was done in the desert, this on a high mountain; both there and here, the glory of Jesus. There, as it were, the entrance of faith was seen, here, as it were, its departure, where the matter is discerned with manifest faith. About that one, the Apostle says, *We see now through a mirror and in enigma* (1 Cor 13:12); of this one, John says, *We have seen His glory, glory as if of the only-begotten of the Father* (Jn 1:14).

Lord Jesus, since You, as it were, took off our mortality for an hour, could you not, if it would hasten our salvation without a plundering of pain and groaning, put Your power and beauty on top, and not permit Your sackcloth to be torn by the Jews, but rather make comedy from sackcloth¹⁰ as easily as wine from water? But as the Passion, as was proper, was voluntary, by a clearer light, it appears He was to accept, without coercion or inevitable necessity, what was in the mouth of Benjamin's sack along that way (Gen 42:27-28)—by the open sack was revealed the

9 The Hebrew root of the name *Horeb*—*h-r-b*—is also used in words meaning “wasteland,” “desolate,” “desert,” “dryness,” “drought,” etc. Hence the name *Horeb* might have been chosen to mean the “mountain of the wilderness,” though Peter is focusing on the “dryness” connection. See *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), 351-352.

10 In Latin, there is a pun here on *saccum* (“sackcloth”) and *socum*. Typically, *socum* would be the accusative of *soccus*, meaning a slipper or a loose-fitting shoe, and, by extension, comedy, since comedians wore such shoes on stage. (In the medieval era, the term became applied to stockings as well, hence the English *sock*.) It seems Peter means it in the latter sense: instead of the tragic suffering of the Passion, Jesus would turn it into comedy. In the medieval era, *socum* or *socum* could sometimes be a form of *socna* or *soca*, meaning “a lord’s right to hold court in a jurisdiction,” but this was a specifically Anglo-Saxon usage, being derived from an Anglo-Saxon term. See J.F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 975. *Saccus* can refer to either the sack or the sackcloth; thus the same word appears in the following (long) sentence to describe Benjamin’s sack.

great mystery of piety, as that money, with which the son of the right hand was to redeem Israel and the Gentiles, was in the mouth of Jesus; wherefore, when He said, *It is consummated* (Jn 19:30), and He sent forth His Spirit, the price was paid, and what the adversary had hand-written against us was erased (Col 2:14).

Setting aside such a mystery, what *happened* on the way pertains to the Transfiguration—that is, before he came to the mansion, Benjamin's sack was opened, not torn asunder. For the Passion was a tearing asunder, the Transfiguration, an opening; in the opening, the sack was not emptied or voided, since, the Transfiguration being finished, it received the same form and habit of mortality, or it represented what it received from its mother, entering into the world, and, as it were, it set down a certain prelude of the Resurrection. But in the tearing asunder, it was absorbed in victory, and Jacob did not play with Esau—that is, the devil—but made a game of¹¹ him and supplanted him; so that, the body of sin being destroyed, no plant remained from which a revived deception of the human race could sprout forth and repeat the death of Christ by necessity.

Therefore, the Transfiguration was, as it were, an interpretation of a certain necessary mortality that was to come due to sin, by which Jesus proved Himself not affected by the laws of death, except only when, and how, and how far He wills it, for what was for an hour there would have been continuous if He had willed it. Therefore, He manifested Himself, not as the Jews considered Him to be, but as the apostles believed Him to be; not to all people, but to the witnesses preordained by God, since the truth was not to be suppressed, so that no one would know it, nor was it to be disclosed to the princes of the world, until He had concluded the beginning of His prayer with a better end. For this would be an impediment to His plan, which would generate a detriment to Christian faith; for who would know the sense of the Lord unless He Who is in the bosom of the Father explains it, when no one knew the Son except the Father, nor did anyone know the Father except the Son, and to whom the Son willed to reveal Him (Mt 11:27)? Therefore, in this Transfiguration, the Son commends the Father, and the Father, the Son, saying, *This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him* (Mt 17:5).

Sweet is light—as Solomon says—and *delightful to the eyes is seeing the sun* (Prv 2:17); Peter the apostle proves this, he who, when he saw Jesus clothed in light as in a vestment—for *His vestments were white as snow* (Mt 17:2)—and discerned His face to shine, resplendent as the sun, in His power, said, *Lord, it is good for us to be here* (Mt 17:4); indeed, baited by the hook of such sweetness, which they had forgotten before, he filled the glass of his heart with the trickle dripping from the emissions of Paradise, allured by which, he cried out: *Draw me after you; let us run in the scent of your ointments* (Sgs 1:3). For even if the Gospel, through the shortness of His office (since, like a girded rooster, He speedily runs with such obstinacy that He greets no one along the way), failed to express the fragrance of His mouth, which was driven by a blowing east wind, yet it is to be believed and slightly understood that, beyond all perfumes, those vestments, which had become

11 Peter has a pun here between *lusit* (“played with”) and *illusit* (“made a game of,” “made sport of,” “mocked,” “fooled”).

white like snow, scattered the scent of sweetness on all those present; for so the vision of His sunning would cause less joy if, on His part, He did not communicate a generous blessing to the nose; nor would an integral brotherhood be preserved if, the nose remaining famished, the eye *alone* were satiated.

Therefore, He poured out upon Peter and his companions rivers of His oil, not in one form, but in many, so that they would carry the five thirsting senses on one so solemn bier, *and*, intoxicated, they would say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*; this is to be noted, since He touches what is bodily in a varied way, and remakes what is spiritual variedly. For, because of their lacking, rarely and rare will you find bodies that serve the many senses at one time by one habit; for the diverse senses or appetites have diverse ends in their delight or satiety, so that they always require either diverse times or diverse delights at the same time. Diversely do the spiritual gifts fulfill all the varieties of desires together and at once, and, in good truth, as this is not a lie that deceives, so this is no diminution of fullness which needs subsidiary alternation or vicarious disquiet.

And, behold, Moses and Elijah appeared, speaking with Him (Mt 17:3). Here approaches the vagabond question that frequently circles about the gyre of heaven, asking why Moses and Elijah came, in the body or in the spirit, before the rest, since they were speaking with Him. But what urges on this question, to which no certain response can be given? And if it contains desirable marrow, the hard mouth and solid gum of whelps can assuredly gnaw on this, *but* they cannot penetrate it. The appetite longs to crack it, but power everywhere fails to extract the guarded marrow; however, since shameless labor conquers all,¹² it is sweet to beat at it and to go around the surrounding city, so that this honest solicitude might, at the least, find solace in labor.

Therefore, it occurs to the investigating soul that Moses and Elijah were mountain-men, and fleers of the consort of men; on mountains, they knew many things, with angelic helpers from God, and they dedicated their lives to solitude, as much as possible. Wherefore, as if by custom, in that they had, by now, celebrated many councils with Jesus in the mountains, the angelic ministry having informed them of this solemn *council* of the Transfiguration, they were eager to be present *at it*. By reason of such shining luminaries and the glorification of the assumed humanity, which was to be preached, he whose eyes had never gone blind nor whose teeth set grinding, Moses, *ran to the Transfiguration*; for this reason, he, too, whose flesh had not seen the corruption of death, whose mortality, by an almost singular privilege, not consumed by the fiery chariot, nor absorbed

12 A slight variant of a line from Virgil's *Georgics* I.145-146: *Labor omnia vincit / improbus*. *Improbis* typically has a negative connotation (poor quality, improper, wicked, dishonest, impudent, shameless, violent, excessive, immoderate, etc.); however, it can also mean "restless," "persistent," etc. The latter sense is usually understood in regards to this saying, since it comes in the midst of Virgil's dire praise of the hard work of farming: "Steady labor conquers all, and necessity urging in hard conditions...and unless you, with assiduous hoes, harass the grass and, with sound, frighten birds, and, with sickle, press upon the dark field's shadows and, with vows, call upon the rain, alas! another's great hoard you'll behold in vain, and, beating the oak, you'll soothe your hunger in the woods" (I.145-146, 155-159).

by death, now enjoyed the region of the immortals; and he nearly conquered death, by an unwonted and long delay.¹³

Perhaps, too, Jesus, keeping vigil in prayers on the mountains, was used to their presence, and had prefixed the day, so that He would ask both of them about their dissimilar states, according to the assumed humanity, about which was more powerful, the state of Moses, denuded of the body, or of Elijah, still living in the body. For it was in Jesus' power to choose what He willed, namely, to hold to the proposition of either, without doubt. Indeed, one was seen to be just according to the person assuming and assumed; the other, truly, was undoubtedly necessary because of the office of patronage, and the negotiation of quarrels, and in the cause of the ones who sweat; yet that meditator borrowed from both, according to their dispensation, so that He first put off his mortal body without death, by glorification, not by a perpetual transition, retaining both something of the old and something changed, *something* from His new and future state, so that He would draw from the change of Moses and the retention of Elijah.

There is another reason why Moses and Elijah were seen at the Transfiguration with the Lord; for the assumed humanity did not refuse to have witnesses, before men as well as before angels, since it hung from His own will either to die for man, and thus to enter into His glory, or, breaking off the negotiation of our redemption, without interposing death, to return to the right hand of the Father. Therefore, everything was to be done in council; He ordered men, as authenticators, to be present at His transfiguration, so that Moses, as their author, would convince the unbelieving Jews, while Elijah, who is to come at the end of the world, would protest, with all assurance, that Christ is to be adored, not the Antichrist;¹⁴ there are also other reasons which have been expounded by the holy Fathers, or which remain to be expounded in their times.

Speaking with Him, it says, they preserve discipline, nor do they exceed the limits of the mandate; they do not speak to the apostles, but with Jesus, since they did not come to Him here in order to hear worldly rumors, or to refer to things not yet to be explained, namely, the written, holy canons of the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord. About what and to Whom they came, they speak; and they place their fingers over their mouths, lest they speak of works, I do not say of men, but neither of angels. Perhaps, by his death, Moses pleads for the people of the Jews, whose imminent ruins he foresees, so that at least a remnant might be saved; perhaps, not laying aside his zeal, Elijah discerns the conquest which was to occur under Titus and Vespasian;¹⁵ yet we hold to the secret of their colloquy, we do not discuss it, since the glory of God is to conceal a word (Prv 25:2).

13 Here Peter affirms the tradition that Elijah was not to escape death completely; rather, his death was “delayed” after being taken up by the fiery chariot. Peter agreed with the tradition that Enoch and Elijah were the two witnesses of Rev 11, who are to come back at the end of time in order to finally die; at the very least, he mentions Elijah’s apocalyptic coming two paragraphs below.

14 A reference to the two witnesses of Rev 11 who, by tradition, were Enoch and Elijah.

15 This refers to the Siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which resulted in the destruction of the Temple. Vespasian began the assault—whose goal was to suppress Jewish revolt—then, when he returned to Rome to be declared Emperor, he handed the reins of the assault over to his son Titus.

It follows: *And behold, a lightful cloud overshadowed them* (Mt 17:5); the Gospel reading is to be studied earnestly, and, from it, the course of our oration is to be woven; for, not from our own *threads*, but from its, ought we to weave a tabernacle for the God of Jacob;¹⁶ for God does not dwell in things made by hands (Acts 7:48), that is, in those which were devised by human ingenuity, without grace, through which the knowledge or love of God is acquired. For God does not dwell in things made by hands, being made known through inane philosophy and through foolish fables or genealogies and interminable questions; whence it is that a grove—that is, quibbling and obscure sophistry—is forbidden to be planted next to the altar of God (Dt 16:21).¹⁷ Indeed, only those authenticated words of the prophets and apostles, and the Scriptures confirmed by ecclesiastical authority, are to be read and sung in church; for these are like a lightful cloud, that is, the divine Scripture, or the Catholic Church, is a lightful cloud.

The Scripture is a cloud for three reasons: because it cools in the heat of temptation, teaching them a befitting remedy; it overshadows in the anguish of persecution, promising prizes to those to whom the passions of this time are not as worthy as the future glory which will be revealed in us (Rom 8:18); it rains in the time of dryness, putting infernal evaporations and smoking joints before our eyes; wherefore the summery and healthful exhalations from the region above the stars, which fully fill the purest and most blessed spirits, are ineffably fragrant and not troubled by a little cough; *a lightful cloud*, it says, *overshadowed them*. The Psalmist explores and implores this overshadowing, saying, *set a shadow over my head in the day of war* (Ps 140:7); the day of war is all of this life, since warfare is the life of man upon earth (Job 7:1), where there is the battle against flesh and blood, against princes and powers, against the leaders of these darknesses, against the spiritual iniquities in the heavens (Eph 6:12).

An iron sword will not be enough against these, unless a lightful cloud—that is, the grace which has given birth to the divine Scripture from its bowels—overshadows you; nor will it suffer its offspring to be violated by this; indeed, through the breasts of the Old and New Testament, it expresses as many drops as the trickle from its womb, with which the virgin Mary was impregnated; by which its adoptive progeny was regenerated, through the lightful cloud, which is the Church; for divine grace fills both breasts, both the Church and the Scripture, to the full, with equal measure; wherefore two-fold is the lactation, but one the education of the children. Therefore, the Church is the cloud which sojourns from the Lord; that is lightful which is always made fruitful by the Holy Spirit; she overshadows her children as a hen her chicks, lest they yield to adversity, lest they fall away in persecution, lest they are endangered by the delay of the prize.

16 A reference to the tents (or tabernacles) that Peter desired to set up on Mount Tabor (Mt 17:4).

17 The grove described in this verse is one that is sacred to some deity (*lucus* in the Vulgate, though Peter uses *nemus* here); it is thus a prohibition against idolatry (modern translations often explain this grove as an “Asherah pole,” which was dedicated to a Canaanite goddess). Peter focuses instead on the thick clustering of trees, likening it to a choking thicket of sophisms.