

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on February 15, 2015*

YEAR B - TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

Today, my brethren, is the last Sunday after the Epiphany, which we celebrate as Transfiguration Sunday. The Transfiguration is the event described in our gospel reading today, wherein Jesus is revealed upon Mount Tabor as a bright shining light before James & John. This light, known theologically as the Tabor Light, is held by Orthodox doctrine to be the very uncreated divine Light, and the Light to which we may attain through the process of theosis or deification.

We discussed theosis briefly during the Advent Season, but let us return to it now in a little more detail. You will recall that the process of theosis is comprised of three stages: Catharsis, Theoria, and Theosis proper. Catharsis is a stage of preparation and purification. Theoria is a stage of contemplative prayer that leads to illumination and what the Western Church refers to as the Beatific Vision. Theosis is the culmination of this process and represents the divinization of spiritualization of the soul. Little can be said of this final stage, being a state of spiritual perfection, but let us look briefly at the two preparatory stages of Catharsis and Theoria.

The process of our purification begins with the Rite of Baptism. The Rite of Chrismation is an extension and the completion of the Baptismal Rite. And this sacramental purification continues with the Rite of Eucharist, which slowly transforms us over the course of our lifetime, little by little, as we consume and assimilate this spiritual nourishment. This sacramental path toward purification is crucial for our ultimate attainment of deification, but it is not the only thing we must do. It is important to also utilize the path of asceticism in our purificatory work.

Now, this asceticism need not become one's normal mode of life to be effective. In fact, a purely ascetic lifestyle can become detrimental if asceticism becomes the goal rather than a means to an end, which is illumination. However, when correctly applied, ascetic practices can be particularly efficacious for attaining states of mystical awareness. There are a number of different ascetic practices at our disposal, from fasting, to contemplative prayer, to the use of posture, rhythmic breathing, and intonation. Eastern Orthodoxy utilizes a method called Hesychasm, after the Greek word for silence. Lectio Divina is another tool we have. We should become acquainted with all of these methods, and experiment with them and learn which methods prove to be most useful.

As you can see, the process of purification moves seamlessly into the realm of contemplation & illumination. This is the stage of Theoria. As with the other processes we've discussed, we cannot draw sharp lines to say "Catharsis ends here" and "Theoria begins here." But the general categories hold true nonetheless. To attain Theoria is for one's consciousness to be filled with and absorbed in the Divine Light; it is the experiential knowledge of God. And it is through the repeated attainment of this gnosis, through sacramental and ascetic means, that our psychic body - that is, our soul - is gradually spiritualized into a body of pneumatic luminescence.