

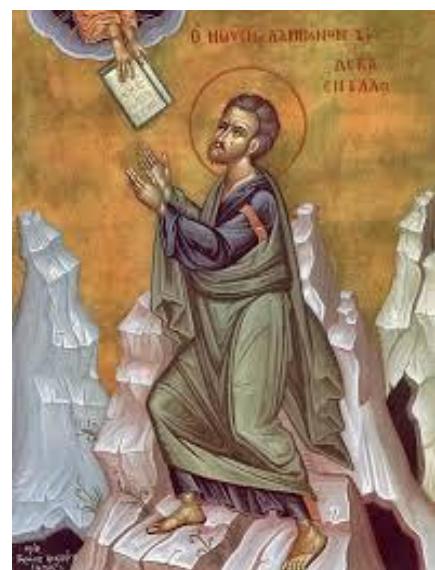
The Life of Faith: Awaiting the Glory of God

One way of summarising the purpose for which God created us is to understand it as a calling to recognise and respond to the vision of the Glory of God. This is implied in the way in which our fundamental character and identity is described at the start of the Bible as having been made ‘in the image and likeness of God’ (cf Genesis 1.26-7). It is as creatures enabled to reflect the Glory of God that we fulfil our basic identity.

There are echoes of the ‘Creation Narrative’ – that is, the description at the start of Genesis which outlines the creation of the world and explains the relationship between the creation itself and God who created it – in other moments during which God’s Presence becomes manifest to his people. At the moment when God prepares to declare his commandments to Moses – to clarify the values and norms by which he requires his people to abide – he calls Moses up the mountain where he waits for a period of six days, clearly echoing the six days of creation; and the Glory of God expresses the revelation of God’s Will on the seventh – the Sabbath, the day of rest:

The Lord said to Moses: ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’ So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. To the elders he had said, ‘Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.’ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Exodus 24.12-end



The moment at which God discloses his Glory is a moment of unutterable majesty, of awe: the text goes so far as to describe it as being a ‘devouring fire’ which will purge away everything which is unworthy of the Presence of God. The disclosure of God’s Glory is not something casual or informal. It has required six days of intense preparation on the part of Moses; and in turn this is the culmination of an extended period of ‘forty days and forty nights’ during which Moses has been ‘on the mountain’ getting ready.

We are about to embark on the forty days and forty nights of *Lent*. It is a time during which we, like Moses, can start to disentangle ourselves from some of the worldly preoccupations which prevent us from beholding the Glory of God. Lent invites us to go with Moses ‘onto the mountain’, the place of detachment and withdrawal, of self-preparation and intense focus. At the culmination of the forty days, we too will spend six days, the Holy Week of the Passion of the Lord, as if ‘in the cloud’ from which we can no longer see very clearly, but during which our sense and sight can be refocussed in a *different direction*, that on the seventh day we shall behold the *Pascha*, the ‘Easter Mystery’ in which the whole creation is made new in the light of the Resurrection itself, the ultimate disclosure of the Glory of God in which all things hold together and truly make sense.

Moses is not accompanied up the mountain by all the people. The vast majority stay at the foot of the mountain, continuing to engage with their experience of life ‘as normal’, one step or more away from the vision of God. Nor do they behold the Glory of God on that culminating day. To them is given only a *report* of the vision of God’s Glory; but they have no first-hand experience of it themselves. For Moses the vision comes as a fruit of that special *spiritual labour on the mountain* – the forty days of self-preparation; the six days of intense waiting in the Presence of God, the attentiveness which is the fruit of having *made himself ready* to stand before God in the first place. The Vision itself will be made manifest only to those who are ready to receive it. May we, in turn, use this coming Lenten fast of forty days and forty nights to reorient our focus and attention away from lower things and back towards the promptings of the Spirit of God, that we shall be ready and clear-minded in time for the Holy Week and Easter, fit to behold the disclosure of the Glory of God, and suitably prepared in spirit to begin to understand it. Let us, with Moses, put in that effort *now*, that we shall be ready *then*; and that, with him, we shall behold the *Vision of God*.