

Wait On The Lord

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Some popular stand-up comedians have recently taken to upbraiding the God of the Old Testament. He is, they complain in their routines, ruthless. He is unpredictable. He is—especially in the case of Moses—distinctly unfair. One comic recently declared, as he strode across the stage with his microphone and cigarette, that it wasn't right that Moses should be kept from entering the Promised Land. After all, he had done many good and courageous things for God.

The Feast of the Transfiguration this week gives us a chance to reflect on this comic's declaration. On the day before the Feast we remember a woman who also can encourage us to think about God's "fairness." She is Saint Nonna, the mother of Saint Gregory the Theologian and a woman who knew the efficacy of heartfelt prayer.

Nonna, a dedicated Christian, was married to a pagan man. Her husband's lack of belief was a source of pain for many years, but she kept praying for his enlightenment. Though it took a long time, Nonna's husband did become a Christian, and eventually was made bishop of the city of Nazianzus. Nonna was a female deacon. One of the duties of deaconesses was to help and guide Christian women married to pagans. So she may well have been a strong support to other women in her same circumstances. In addition, of course, she was the influential mother of one of the Church's greatest saints.

But Nonna had to wait on the Lord. Her husband's conversion came only after long years of faithful prayer. She had to trust God, and believe that He would choose the right time to turn her husband to the faith.

We Christians have a similar trust in God's intention for His beloved prophet Moses. For us, unlike the comedians who complain of the unfair way God treated him, Moses' story does not end with the Lord's words in Deuteronomy 34:4, when He tells Moses, "I have let you see it [the Promised Land] with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." At the Feast of the Transfiguration, we will see him again.

Not only will we see Moses, but he will be standing with the Lord in His glory, representing the Law and all those who have died. Moses will show us the eternal life that God intends for all of us.

Nonna in her lifetime never doubted that the Lord would answer her prayers for her husband. Moses wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land, but he was given the great gift of standing before the whole universe in the Lord's transfigured presence. When we are tempted to wonder about God's providence, or His "fairness", we can look to the pious example of Nonna. We can study the icon that shows us the mountaintop appearance of Moses long after his earthly death. They remind us of what it means to wait on the Lord.

