

2nd Sunday of Year B

Mk. 9:2-13

If we were to ask Peter, James and John to tell us of all the wonderful things they had witnessed in the presence of Jesus, which were the most memorable and unusual, I wouldn't be surprised if they said the Transfiguration.

Jesus' face shone like the sun, His clothes were dazzling white, and by His side was Moses and Elijah: this vision was indelibly printed on their minds, never to be effaced.

Then as an awesome voice from Heaven proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." The sound reverberated through their consciousness and filled them with awe, wonder and fear. What an experience!

We think this rare or unusual event cannot possibly happen to us. The truth is we too have the opportunity to experience a mini-transfiguration every day in prayer. It all begins when we allow Jesus to take us aside and be alone with Him. It can, if we set aside a specific time for prayer each day, a time free of distractions, whereby we are able to open our hearts before the Lord.

Jesus will reveal His glory to us as we focus on His presence - whether by meditating on a passage of Scripture, imagining a scene from the Gospels, or simply repeating His name over and over in our hearts. As we surrender ourselves to Him, He will show Himself to us as Lord and Master, and yet also as a deeply personal God who knows and cares about every detail of our lives. His immense yet intimate love can overwhelm us and make us kneel in awe. Like Peter we will want to keep Him all to ourselves and bask in His glory.

As we sit in the presence of Jesus, obeying His Father's wish to listen to His Son He will speak to our hearts. He may want to give us a deeper revelation of His love or mercy. He may point out a habit of sin that is preventing us from experiencing the freedom He won for us by His crucifixion. He may want to speak a word of encouragement to us, or call us into a deeper service to His people. Just as the disciples heard the voice from heaven, we can hear Jesus in the stillness of our hearts.

Jesus loves to give us a glimpse of His glory so that we can move on with Him and become all that He has created us to be. Like Peter, James and John, we too can be lifted up into the presence of the Lord and hear His voice. As we learn to silence our hearts in prayer, each day can become a mini-transfiguration for us. And as we draw near to Him today, let us do so with great expectancy and anticipation of all that God wants to do in us.

Lord Jesus, You are the Father's gift to us. You are our all! May we quieten our hearts and listen to what You have to say to us. Show us Your glory. Speak to our hearts in such a way that we will know undeniably that we have heard Your voice. Thank You for being with us.

BELIEVE IN THE BEST EXPERIENCES, NOT THE WORST

Mk. 9:2-10

You could make a claim that towards the end of the last century there was a note of euphoria among peoples. It seemed the threat of war was over. Communist regimes in Eastern Europe at long last began to crumble. The Soviet Union renounced the oppressive policies of the Stalin era. I believe this came about because of the prayers we used to say for Russia at the end of Mass for many years. The Berlin wall came down. Germany was reunited. A new day of peace and cooperation between nations had dawned. Then on 2 August 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait. Under the auspices of the United Nations, a massive military and naval build up took place in and around the Persian Gulf. On 17 January 1991 war began yet again.

In a short time, we had encountered on a global scale, two totally different experiences. The first was a brief and refreshing taste of peace. The second was a sad return to war and conflict. Now it is for us to decide which of these two experiences is telling us the ultimate truth about life. What kind of place is our world meant to be? Is it primarily a battle ground? Is war the real thing? Is it destined to be a continual war as long as the world endures or is peace a real possibility? What kind of people are we? Is the human race a family that will never learn to live in harmony?

Life offers conflicting answers to all these questions. One tells us to believe in our hopes and keep working bravely towards them. The other tells us that we are fooling ourselves to believe that all nations can live in peace. Hope for a bright peaceful future is just an empty dream. One tells us that our God is One who cares and that we are His children, and that finally His purposes will prevail. The other tells us that God does not care and that we are like orphans left to get on with life on our own. Which can we trust? On which do we build our lives – the good and peaceful times the world has experienced or the days without hope when we are plunged into despair? Both are a real part of life, but both can't be ultimately true. Either God cares or He does not. This world either has a plan behind it and a goal ahead or it, or it is aimlessly lurching from one war to another. You and I are either children of our Father in Heaven or we are orphans left to get on with life on our own.

Jesus faced these same questions and struggled with these same options, just as we do. Today's Gospel reading tells of one of His highest hours. The light of Heaven was on His face. His clothes became whiter than snow. He talked face to face with Moses and Elijah. He heard the voice of God say, "This is My Son, the Beloved." He left the Mount of Transfiguration and walked straight to Jerusalem, where He was nailed to a cross. In a matter of a few days, He was lifted to the heights of hope and then plunged to the depths of despair. Jesus kept on believing the testimony of His best hours, against the testimony of His worst hours. No one could take that from Him for He was a Person Who was full of hope.

How many of us come at life from the opposite direction? We have difficulty trusting our best experiences. We find it hard to accept them as reliable witnesses. The brief interludes of peace seem like passing illusions. Beautiful though they are, they are not believable. The dreadful reality we call war is the real thing. It has always been

there and always will be. War is the way individuals have settled their differences from the beginning of time, and will continue doing so until the end of time. Is this the way we think? Why is it we are so inclined to trust the testimony of our worst experiences, against the testimony of our best experiences, as to the meaning of life?

One reason, no doubt, is because the best seems too good to be true. It would be beautiful to believe in peace instead of war, in transfigurations instead of crucifixions, in hope instead of despair. The problem is that the reality tells another story. We live in a harsh and cruel world. To believe in our best hours seems only a way of escape for those who cannot face the brutal realities of life. Let us examine that attitude and see whether or not it deals with reality.

Since when has the Christian faith been primarily a matter of comfort? Which of the greatest representatives of our faith have enjoyed lives of comfort? Certainly, not its Founder? He was born in a stable, in His preaching days He was homeless, and He died on a cross. Certainly, not His Apostles. They were persecuted, and most of them died as martyrs. Follow the trail of great Christians through the years, and you find that same pattern – not ease and comfort, but struggle and sacrifice. Yet these were the men and women who believed in the truthfulness of their highest hopes.

Another reason we have difficulty in believing in our best experiences is because they get overshadowed by our worst ones. We live in a world where the bad news seems to outweigh the good news, by a ratio of at least ten to one. Day after day, we are bombarded with stories of hatred and violence, greed and lust, wars and rumours of wars. We can blame the media for this. They know bad news sells their papers. In our sober moments we know that for every bad incident that takes place we could relate ten good. The papers cannot report all the evil that is perpetrated. Nevertheless, a steady diet of bad news can have a devastating effect on the human spirit. It creates the impression that the whole world is on a slippery slope to hell, and nothing can turn it back.

We are like people who live in a region that is nearly always overcast by clouds. For weeks at a time, they are shrouded in fog and mist. Only occasionally do the clouds break and the sun is seen. If those people are to live happily in that place, they must believe that the clouds do break and that above them is the sun and the blue sky.

This is what Jesus did; and His early disciples learned from Him. They kept a firm grip on their best experiences, and believed that those experiences were telling them the ultimate truth about life. To them the story of Christ was all good news. It wasn't just idealism, it was reality. It was a message, not about how things ought to be, but about how things really are; that God cares, that we are His children and that He is working out a purpose in this world that shall never fail. We have confidence to believe in the reality of the best.

Lord Jesus, we all need to take this truth to our hearts. We are growing older and the decades come and go. With the passing years, we come to think of life, either in terms of the high moments or the low moments. It would be time well spent if we

were to go back and recapture some of the great experiences and believe they are telling us the truth about life.

GOD'S LOVE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Gen. 22:1-2,9-13,15-18; Rom.8:31-34 & Mk.9:2-10

Few things are more painful for a parent to bear than the loss of a child, whether this is due to illness, accident or crime. And what if it were an only child? Such was the heroic sacrifice which Abraham was asked to make in today's first reading.

But his willingness to sacrifice his own son Isaac is none other than a preview of the story of God's own dramatic sacrifice of His only Son Jesus on the Cross. Isaac, therefore, is a figure of Christ Himself and when we picture him being marched up Mount Moriah, with the bundle of firewood on his shoulders, we can immediately connect with Jesus carrying His Cross and climbing Mount Calvary for the ultimate sacrifice.

The story of the Transfiguration in today's Gospel is a majestic introduction to the Passion and Death of Jesus. We see God the Father presenting His Beloved Son to the world. It was witnessed by Moses the Law-giver, Elijah the prophet representing the Old Testament and by the Apostles Peter, James and John representing the New Testament. It is as if God were saying to the world, 'Look, this is My Beloved Son, whom I am going to sacrifice for your sake.' God our Father and Jesus His beloved Son could not have loved us any more than they did.

Love is proved by giving. God proved His love for us by giving all He had, in the person of His Son Jesus. This is God's answer to us when suffering comes our way and we are tempted to scream, 'Why, O why, should this happen to me?' When we turn our eyes to the crucifix, we find the answer, and then our speech is reduced to an awesome silence before the mystery of God's love.

Another reason why the Transfiguration is put before us today is that it encourages us to persevere faithfully in the face of suffering. The Lord wanted Peter, James and John to experience the vision of His glory so that, in due course, when confronted with the scandal of His crucifixion, they would not lose faith but persevere in their commitment to Him.

So, it is with us. In life God sometimes gives us fleeting glimpses of His glory, ecstatic moments which remind us of that glory which awaits us at the end. This is done so that, in times of trial and discouragement, we can persevere steadfastly by keeping our eyes fixed on the glorious end.

During this season of Lent, too, when we may begin to lose our enthusiasm and feel tempted to go back on our Lenten resolutions, let us hold on to the Lord by keeping before us the memory of the Transfiguration.

Heavenly Father, how generously You proved Your love for us by allowing Your only begotten Son to sacrifice His life on the Cross. During this Lent, through our acts of

prayer, penance and almsgiving may we lay down our lives for You. May the mystery of the Transfiguration put new heart in us when clouds of darkness enter our lives.

AN EXPERIENCE WE ALL NEED

Mk. 9:2-10

I have been very fortunate to have been on pilgrimage to the Holy Land several times. Among the indelible memories I treasure is my first visit to Mount Tabor. What made it so memorable was the fact that I visited it in the evening when the sun was setting and the sky was aglow in red and orange for a long time. It was so easy for me to image Peter saying to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is wonderful for us to here." What an indescribable experience it was for Peter, James and John to be with Jesus on that lonely mountain with the rest of the world left behind and to bask in the light of His glory.

All of us need that kind of experience. Many of us are so plunged in the noise and materialism of this world that we think that this is all there is. There are times when we need to go to a mountain top with Jesus and catch a glimpse of something better. From the Preface of the Mass of the Transfiguration we know why Jesus appeared to His three Apostles. The Preface says, that Jesus 'bathed in dazzling radiance, so that His Disciples might not lose faith when they saw Him stricken on the Cross; and that the splendour of the Head might prefigure the destiny of His Body, the Church'. What does an experience like that mean to us and why do we need it? I can think of several reasons.

Firstly, we need to be reminded of those values that the world makes us forget. The world makes us make significant things seem small and the small seem great. Someone once said, "A penny held close enough to the eye can block out the sun." That is what the world does to us. It fills our vision with the little things until the big things can no longer be seen. If we live with that long enough, it is to be expected that we lose the values that really matter. What a difference it would make if for a while we could focus our minds on Jesus and the things for which He stands. We need to be reminded of the important things that the world makes us forget.

Secondly, we need that kind of experience to enable us to regain our sense of direction. We do not correct our course in life merely by working longer and trying harder. If you are lost in a maze or in the woods, the worst thing you can do is to keep going. Almost invariably, you will be walking in circles and using up the daylight and burning up all your energy. What you need is elevation. If there is a hill or a high tree close by, climb up it. From that altitude you will be able to see some horizons and where you are.

We need that in our personal lives. The pressures of daily living are sometimes not unlike a jungle. We can get lost in them and forget who we are, why we are here and where we are going. If somewhere in our minds we could climb a mountain with Jesus, that could be the thing to get us back on course again.

Thirdly, we need a transforming experience to reprove what is wrong in our lives. In the day-to-day events of life, it is dangerously easy to get by with a lackadaisical

conscience. We can think that there are plenty of people living lives worse than ours. There is plenty of darkness under which to hide the spots and stains of our own character. The devil has a tendency to help us compare ourselves to others, and we can appear to be pretty good. But get alone with Jesus and your worst self is challenged by His best self. This is what Peter felt when he fell to his knees and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." That is a humbling experience, but without it there can be no spiritual health. We can spend all our time with the world and think pretty well of ourselves, or we can slip away to 'a mountain top' with Christ, and let Him show us what we are and help us to become what we ought to be.

Finally, we need this mountain top experience with Jesus in order to find the balance between prayer and work, to rededicate our lives and release the power within us. If we followed our reading in Mark's Gospel a little further, we would discover that when Jesus and His three Apostles came down from the mountain, they were met by a desperate father with a sick son. There was work to be done and there always will be. Work alone is not the answer, it must be backed up with prayer. Work must be the fruit of our prayer life. One without the other is like trying to row a boat with one oar. We will find ourselves going in circles and getting nowhere.

Lord Jesus, like Peter, James and John we all need 'a mountain top' experience of being alone with You. It would help us to lead lives of true values, clear direction, moral integrity and practical usefulness. We all need on some regular basis to find a way to close out the world and focus our minds for a while on Your radiant glory.



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