

Sermon for Transfiguration, Year C

The Text: Luke 9:28-36

Have you seen a human face transfigured by intense joy? Most brides look radiant, not simply because of the bridal dress, their special hair-do or careful make-up, but because of a deep inner joy that shines out. They're radiant from the inside. Then there are the shining eyes of grateful parents as they gaze in wonder at their firstborn child. Or, later, it may be their faces shining with pride as their child receives an award at a prize-giving ceremony.

There is also the radiant glow seen on the faces of adults when they've been baptised or the awesome joy of hospital patients as they hover between life and death, the radiant joy on their faces as they receive Holy Communion. A rarer privilege is seeing the face of a Christian glow radiantly as he or she prays to God.

Today we celebrate the festival of Christ, our Praying Saviour. Just before today's sermon text, our Lord's disciples have just received shattering news from Jesus, news they'd never expected to hear: that the best Friend and Teacher they'd ever known would be crucified by the leaders of their nation. What a blow to their earthly ambitions for a kingdom on earth! This wasn't news they'd ever wanted to hear. Perhaps they were having some misgivings about following Jesus. After all, who wants to follow a leader who'll soon die!

So Jesus gives His three closest followers, Peter, James and John, a glimpse of who He really is, the Son of God from heaven, and not just the son of Mary. The three are in need of encouragement, and Peter, James and John are tired after the long climb to the top of the mountain. While Jesus is in contact with heaven through prayer, His three friends are asleep. What a candid comment, so honest about themselves, even at their own expense. Comments like this help us see that we're dealing with what really happened, rather than something made up.

Imagine their regret, even years later, when they realised they had gone to sleep at one of the greatest moments of their lives. Who knows how much of Jesus' glorious transformation and conversation with Moses and Elijah they missed out on? Those of us who have fallen asleep during the best part of a TV program can sympathise with Peter. Jesus keeps in constant communion with God. He spends any spare moment He has in prayer for us. Moses and Elijah come to our Lord to speak with Him about the uppermost topic in heaven, Jesus' suffering and dying for us on the Mountain of Sacrifice: Calvary. There Jesus would effect a greater deliverance for us, a greater Exodus than the exodus from Egypt under Moses. As a deliverer from slavery, Moses is a prototype of Jesus. And Elijah is more than a prophet; he was seen as a forerunner of the Messiah.

Moses and Elijah don't bring tidings from heaven. Instead, they talk with Jesus about the events of Good Friday. Amid Christ's transfiguration glory, they speak about our Saviour's inglorious death on the cross. Jesus chooses to die with you and for you, rather than to live and reign in heaven without you. Your Saviour is your fellow-sufferer, who understands from the inside your suffering and fear of death. This is such an immense truth which each Lenten season seeks to illuminate further.

True to character, Peter wakes up and wants to prolong the glory of this occasion. "Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' – not knowing what he said (Luke 9:33)." Peter often says something misguided when he speaks without thinking. This happens again here, as he sets about advising Jesus what to do. Graciously, our Lord makes no critical comment. Have you occasionally said something you instantly wish you hadn't said? Then it's too late. The damage has already been done. Then, it's often easier to apologise and say "sorry" than to explain what you really meant. A prayer that needs to be said often is: "O Lord, please help me to think before I speak."

Instead of returning to meet the needs of the people at the foot of the mountain, Peter thinks only of himself and of prolonging this wonderful event for himself. Wouldn't we all like to prolong life's joyous occasions like family reunions, Christmas Day lunches and weddings? God sends us such mountain-top experiences to strengthen us for the duties before us. Life's valleys of disappointment, frustration and ill-health help us

appreciate our mountain-top experiences all the more. Life in the valley is made more bearable by God's gift of joyous moments shared together.

Peter, James and John's experience of the transfiguration enabled them to trust what God says. What they heard made a greater impact than what they saw. The voice of God said, "This is My Son, My Chosen; listen to Him." With Jesus, you get more than you see. You receive from Him "the words of eternal life", words full of the power and energy of eternity. We all know the transforming power of words like "I love you". No words can transform us better than words of forgiveness and comfort from Jesus. Behind every word of His, is your Lord's everlasting love for you. We meet our beautiful Saviour in the Gospel here and now. The Gospels are our Exodus into the life, not of the Promised Land, but the life of our Lord through whom there is freedom from the fear of death, freedom from sin and guilt.

Through His Word and Sacraments, He transforms us into His likeness and shares His glory with us. Today's second reading speaks about this: "All of us ... seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18)."

St. Paul describes what's happening to us in this way: "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)." Christians are often concerned about their lack of spiritual progress. Such concern is a good sign, evidence of a growing faith in God. St. Paul reassures us that wonderful things are happening inside, a transformation from one degree of glory to another.

Our growth in faith and love, a glorious growth, is something best seen by God and wise fellow Christians. The glory that shone from Christ at His transfiguration is growing inside all those who love Him with their whole heart. His glory enters us through our ears as we eagerly listen to Jesus. What Peter heard that day made a greater impact on him than what he saw. The more we listen to the Word of our Lord, the more we will see His presence around us in our daily living.

There is a beautiful little story about a boy and an old man sitting on a dock in the later afternoon, fishing. They talked about many things – why

sunsets are red, why the rain falls, why the seasons change, what life is like. Finally the boy looked up at the old man, as the old man was baiting his hook for him, and asked, "Does anybody ever see God?" "Son", said the old man, looking across the blue water, "It's getting so I hardly see anything else."

Jesus re-defined our idea of glory. His suffering on the cross is the most glorious act of love enacted by Jesus for us. Suffering and glory are no longer opposites. Our world thinks of glory in terms of privilege, power and success. For Jesus, glory meant suffering for us, being obedient to His Father's will, even if it meant death on a cross. That's why we sing during Lent "In the cross of Christ I glory".

This Lenten season gives us opportunity to grow closer to Jesus by giving Him more of the most precious gift love can give anyone, the gift of time, time spent in prayer and the reading of His Word, especially chapters 12 to 19 of St. John's Gospel. A Lenten-season well-spent brings rich blessings into the events of the rest of the year. Countless Christians in the past have been unbelievably blessed by a faithful commemoration of Lent. God grant that this will be your experience too this year. Amen.