

# Sunday Homily

## SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE LENT

27 FEBRUARY 2022

YEAR C

“Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep;  
but since they had stayed awake,  
they saw his glory.”

Luke 9:32

### Illustration

It's probably true to say that the image of King Kong perched precariously on top of the Empire State Building, with “the queen of scream” Fay Wray struggling, and indeed screaming, in his hands, is imprinted on most of our minds. It might look a bit hammy now, but at the time the special effects were astonishing, and helped to give the 1933 film *King Kong* a firm place in our memories and imagination. The same is true of the special effects in the 2005 version of the film, although whether it will be remembered in the future with the same affection remains to be seen. To capture the imagination and make the unbelievable believable has been a major business within the film industry ever since it began. Every film director knows the power of the special effect to enthrall and convince audiences, especially with imaginative plots that take place outside of the everyday familiarity of people's lives.

### Gospel Teaching

Luke is a conscientious storyteller, scrupulous with his dates and history, but at the same time he shows the most delicate skill in weaving together the believable and unbelievable, the real and seemingly unreal. In this, he displays something of the film director's touch. With its virgin birth, miracles and resurrection, the Christian story is full of unbelievable things, and unlike the film director, who simply has to make that which is untrue believable, the greatest and most difficult task of every Christian is to convince others – and even ourselves sometimes – that the unbelievable is true.

And this is what the transfiguration is all about. It comes at a vital turning point in Luke's Gospel. Jesus has just ended his relatively popular ministry in Galilee, and is about to start a journey to Jerusalem and death. Peter has just declared that he believes that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus has begun to explain to his disciples that messiahship means betrayal and death, not glory and fame.

And it is at this crucial point of Jesus' ministry that he and three of his disciples go up a mountain to pray. While he is praying, Luke says, his appearance is

altered, and his clothes become a dazzling white. No wonder the disciples don't seem to know whether they're awake or asleep, and they keep quiet about it afterwards. It's almost too strange to believe; like a little bit of Narnia in the middle of a documentary. Its purpose, though, is to clarify Jesus' identity and to cement his credentials for the task ahead. The presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop – Moses as the greatest lawgiver in the history of the people of God, and Elijah the greatest of the prophets – shows that Jesus is much, much more than a Galilean carpenter with a way with words and a healing touch. He is the fulfilment of all the Law and the prophets; the long-awaited Messiah.

And as if to seal this point, a strange cloud descends upon the assembled group. In the Bible, clouds such as this mean one thing – the terrifying presence of God. It is meant to remind the reader of the giving of the commandments in the Old Testament, when just such a cloud descended on the mountaintop, and the glory of the Lord “was like a consuming fire”. Jesus represents a new Law, a new commandment, anointed by God himself for the task.

## Application

As we go through Lent, and towards the crucifixion, we are about to be confronted with some of the most faith-stretching parts of the Christian story. We will stand at the foot of the cross, and in front of the empty tomb, and reflect deeply on what they mean. Faith is seldom a question of lining up the facts and making a cold-hearted decision. Christianity asks us to believe the most unbelievable things, and therefore a little bit of hot-headed passion – even imagination – is required. Not the kind of imagination which makes the untrue believable, but that which makes the unbelievable true.

Luke wants us to comprehend the breadth of Jesus' identity: to see who he really is, and what he means for each of us. However rational and level-headed we are, we all have those moments when God asks us to declare our faith in his impossible story. Let's pray for God's gift of passion and imagination so that when that moment comes we will be able to respond with words of wonder and worship.