

Sunday Homily

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE LENT

14 FEBRUARY 2021

YEAR B

“He was transfigured before them.”

Mark 9:2

Illustration

This week’s Gospel reading contains no words from Jesus himself. He is at the very centre of a major event, yet he has no comment to make, save to give an instruction to the disciples not to talk about it for the time being. So it is the event itself which must speak to us.

The Bible tells us that the creation of light was God’s first move in the whole creative process. Light is a creative force in its own right. But it can be foe as well as friend.

For the person suffering from migraine, light may heap agony upon agony. The flashlight of a camera can, for a moment, blind us. The electric welder must use a shield to protect his eyes from the brilliance of the arc light which is the tool of his trade. The laser beam which can be the surgeon’s instrument of healing can in other hands be an offensive weapon.

Gospel Teaching

The full glory of God is more than human eyesight can safely accommodate. We are told that Moses’ face was so irradiated by a meeting with God that when he came down the mountain he put on a veil to safeguard the eyesight of those who looked at him. Even at second hand the glory of God has to be treated with care.

Jesus takes his closest friends to the top of a mountain. There, for a moment, they see their friend from Nazareth in a new light. Moses and Elijah come to talk with him. He is bathed in the glorious radiance of his heavenly Father. But the experience is only for a while. Moses and Elijah disappear. The light fades. Back to normal.

Peter, James and John recognise that they have witnessed a moment of special privilege. In a unique way the human Jesus has been revealed to them as the divine Jesus.

One of the glories of being human is that we are susceptible to experiences which lift us out of ourselves and put us on another plane. We have moments when we are specially vulnerable and specially receptive. Those who are musical may be transported by the inspired performance of a familiar work. Those who are sensitive to the visual arts may be captivated by a picture, a sculpture, a

building. Those with an ear for words may find that a poem speaks for them unerringly. And all of us may be swept off our feet by some special experience or other – childbirth, perhaps, or the natural world in powerful uproar or tranquil peace. Our sensitivity to the world around us and to the ways in which it has been enriched by God’s gracious gifts to his children is priceless.

But it is in the very nature of these experiences that they do not last. They may affect us permanently, but they are themselves transient.

Peter, James and John had to leave the hilltop. The memory of what had happened would be with them for ever, but the nitty-gritty world of everyday things was waiting for them at the foot of the mountain.

Application

The high points of everyday living are matched by similar special moments in our spiritual lives. Just at the time when our private prayers and our corporate worship may be going through a difficult patch – perhaps they seem arid, repetitive, lifeless – suddenly there’s a spark. All at once, perhaps for no very obvious reason, something has set a light to our spiritual touchpaper. Perhaps it was the liturgy itself, either in elaborateness at a solemn liturgy or in simplicity at a Taizé-style act of worship. Perhaps it was a noisy, joyful acclamation, perhaps it was in silence. No matter. It’s happened.

And suddenly a prayer monologue becomes a prayer conversation. Yes – there is indeed somebody on the other end of the line. Acts of Holy Communion, which for several weeks may have seemed more duty-driven than invigorating, suddenly come to life. “The body of Christ... the blood of Christ...” for me! We have caught a glimpse.

What matters is that we should take the glimpse with us when we move on. It will help us in the dog days, cheer us when we are feeling down, give us light when all around seems dark.

“’Tis good, Lord, to be here!
Yet we may not remain;
But since thou bidst us leave the mount
Come with us to the plain.”