

Homily Sunday 23rd Feb. The Transfiguration

The Gospel readings for this Sunday before Lent is always the Transfiguration. How might we best link the two – Lent and Transfiguration? We might think of Moses' role as Lawgiver, reminding us of the opportunity to use Lent to come closer to the spirit as well as the letter of God's laws. Or perhaps we'd focus on Elijah, so passionate for the law of Yahweh when the people of Israel were often so far from God's ways. That would seem to fit with today's Collect with its talk of 'disorder...sinful lives...crooked hearts.

That's a traditional approach to Lent, an opportunity for self-discipline, of giving up or taking on a new spiritual practice. It's good to have that opportunity each year. It may be something that you really like or enjoy doing if that is the challenge you want to take on by giving them up. But, don't be like me.... I give up Brussel sprouts each Lent because I don't like them very much!!

There is however something else, and that something links with Jesus' aim for his time in the wilderness – an opportunity to focus on God, and God's call on his life above all else – no distractions, no normal day-to-day things, no planned or chance interactions with other people. Jesus in the wilderness clearly connected to God in a new way. For Peter, James and John the Transfiguration was, quite literally, a 'mountain top experience'. It was a 'religious experience' that changed their lives. Something happened to them, emotionally, spiritually.

How do you respond to that sort of language? Some of us just long for something like that, when we know, without a shadow of doubt, that God is real. Something we can draw on in those tougher times or when we have our doubts about God. We want God to 'zap' us so that we can be totally sure of the faith that we have grown slowly in. Others of us are really rather scared that such a thing might happen to us – we are C. of E. after all! All that emotion and 'spiritual fervour' isn't for us! Yet research has shown that the majority of people (perhaps as many as 70%) have something they define as a 'religious experience' even those who don't reckon they are religious. People have felt something beyond the ordinary, something that has touched them, given them a connection with the world in a different way. And generally, that has been very positive for them. People sometimes talk to other people about it, but sometimes it's just something for themselves. It doesn't always lead to faith but it remains something very special to them.

For Peter, James and John this was a hugely significant moment for them in their life and ministry. And, if Moses and Elijah weren't enough, then there was the cloud and God's voice – 'This is my Son: listen to Him!' Can you imagine what that must have been like? God's voice. We just don't experience things like that. Or do we? Do we never hear God's voice as we read his word? Do we never feel something very deep when we come to receive communion? Are there never times in our prayers when we have a really strong feeling that God wants us to do something.

For Jesus the Transfiguration was the turning point of his ministry, perhaps the most significant after his time in the wilderness. And for the disciples too. Perhaps there were times then when those three disciples would have much rather been in the shelters they'd planned to build – a 'holy huddle' having a great spiritual time, rather than walking the tough path that Jesus had taken. When something very wonderful happens we want it to last forever – but it can't. That's what the disciples seemed to want to do at the Transfiguration – prolong the experience. They wanted to stay there, spending time with Jesus and these two amazing characters from Jewish history. And Lent is a time when we might try to find a bit more time to spend with God, on our own, or in a group.

But Jesus took them back into the hustle and bustle of the everyday, and also to the important work that he had for them, work for which this experience would be a foundation. Being God's gathered people is good for a time, but it is as God's scattered people that we are doing what God wants, as we share his ministry, the calling he asks us to go down from the mountain to fulfil. That's part of Lent to.

Whatever you are going to do for Lent (if anything) why not find that special time to connect with God. Give up some of the busy life – create a quiet time. But remember you still have to go out into the hustle and bustle of life. Shine God's light in the family and community by being you, who you are, someone who follows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen