

SECOND SUNDAY of LENT – YEAR C – (28th February, 2010)

(Genesis 15. 5-12, 17-18: Philippians 3.17 – 4.1: Luke 9.28-36)

One day a poor man living in a hostel for homeless people was walking along the main street of a big city. At a certain point he found himself outside a church. Before he realised it, he was inside. He couldn't recall whether or not he said any prayers. But his soul was flooded with light. His depression lifted and a great peace descended on him. He felt he belonged on the earth after all. He felt close to God and loved by God. The experience didn't last very long. He said later he would give anything to have had a similar experience. For one short moment he tasted glory.

However, when it was over he found himself on the street again going about as aimlessly as before. Several times he went back to the church in the hope of a similar experience but it never happened. The homeless man wanted to hold on to that experience. He wanted to go backwards to it instead of forwards. He might have used the experience to illuminate the darkness of his life and go forward more hopefully and courageously.

Was it not something similar for St. Peter in today's gospel? He made the same mistake. Having seen the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain he wanted to build some tents there and so hold on to the experience and not go back down the mountain to the struggles and trials of daily life. Not only that but Peter didn't focus on the dialogue between Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Their topic of conversation was about the future passing of Jesus which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter, as usual was generous but misguided as he wishes to hold on to the experience. He allows the uniqueness of Jesus to slide away and he blurs what Jesus had said – that the suffering of the cross had to be before the advent of Messianic glory.

In all that will happen the disciples' faith in him as the 'Christ of God' will be severely tested. But even then they must keep faith until the true nature of Jesus is again confirmed in the final conclusive glory of his resurrection on the third day. On the mountain Jesus' loving Father says to the 3 disciples: 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him'. That is, just don't focus on his coming glory but remember the suffering he will have to undergo first. The mountaintop experience was given so as to strengthen them in time of trial

And how much they needed that strength. For there would come another day and another hill. This time the sky would be dark. The face of Jesus would be covered with sweat and blood. His clothes would not dazzle. They would be taken from him. For his companions he would have two criminals. There would be no voice from heaven only the voices of mockers and scorners. The disciples would be shattered and would want no part of what was happening.

In a sense we all have somewhat similar experiences in our daily lives. People who are married remember the joy of their wedding day and their honeymoon. But they can't hold on to that experience. They must move on to the life that follows. And during that time there may be tensions in the marriage, sicknesses, unemployment etc. That is the time when we are asked to be faithful. And of course there will be other 'transfigurations' like wedding and birthday anniversaries, the birth of their children and so on.

For others it may be to hold their first newborn baby in their arms and see the smiling face of their own flesh and blood reflected back to them. Later, there may be difficulties with the children, the normal growing tensions but also very good times.

On this Sunday we read about the Transfiguration of Our Lord. It is important to realise that Jesus went up the mountain to pray. We need to remember the great importance of prayer especially in times of difficulty. Remember that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane to strengthen himself for the coming ordeal of his Passion and death.

We who are followers of Jesus are reminded that we have a goal, a harbour where we are going. Our faith tells us this. This world is not the end of things. We too will be transfigured as the second reading today tells us. St. Paul reminds us that our homeland is in heaven, that here we have no lasting city. Since our homeland is in heaven, 'it is from there will come the Saviour we

are waiting for, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and he will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his own glorious body'.

The Transfiguration was the harbour for Jesus, so that no matter how big the waves were or how violent the ocean might be, Jesus would have the confidence to face all that lay ahead of him. He knows that death will not be the end, a final defeat but the way that leads to glory.

The episode of the Transfiguration reminds us that our being Christians means living in the midst of the ups and downs of daily life. We all have our own personal experiences of how difficult life can be. We know that we may have to face sickness, unemployment, being misunderstood, the sudden death of a loved one etc. God is no less with us at these times though it is harder to see and be aware of this. However, even if we are promised the fullness of the kingdom after we die, it has already here if we respond to God's call. Little by little as we try to do God's will a deeper peace and joy invades our lives.

We must never forget that our God is a faithful God. In the first reading we heard about an ancient ritual whereby the parties bound themselves to fulfil the agreement between them. In the reading we hear about God's making the covenant with Abraham, our father in the faith. God is saying that he will always be faithful to his promises even we fail, as we do from time to time,

"Lord Jesus, Let us never lose sight of You who were transfigured. You are our safe harbour. Give us the courage to be faithful to the end especially in time of trials and difficulties. Amen."

- Fr. Jim Kirstein, SMA