

Second Sunday of Lent

Some of us are probably thinking that the protocols that we have been asked to put in place to reduce the risk of anyone catching the Covid 19 virus while we are celebrating the Eucharist are like the panic buying of toilet paper. Many of us are probably thinking that the precautions that we are being asked to take are not necessary.

And yet we know that what is being asked of us is really an act of charity on behalf of the people with whom we gather. These new protocols take us beyond our own devotion and force us to look at some of the things we do in a fresh way. When there is no Holy Water in the Baptism Font, we have to look anew at how we claim our Christian identity when we come into the church. We may need to reclaim what it means to sign ourselves with the cross. If we are to give each other the sign of peace without touching each other we may need to offer that peace with our eye contact and our voice in a way that expresses more clearly what is in our hearts.

If we are asked to receive Holy Communion in a way that seems less reverent than what we are used to, we may need to express our reverence for the Lord with a deeper bow before we extend our hands to welcome him into our hearts. If we have come to value the

opportunity to express our union with the Lord and with each other by drinking from the one chalice, perhaps now we can remember that the Eucharistic bread is broken for us so that we can be one with Jesus, the Bread of Life.

Perhaps it is good that we are reading the account of the Transfiguration today. It can be seen as a vision that previews the glory that Jesus will enjoy when he passes through death to take up his place with his Father in heaven. Jesus and his three closest disciples look ahead at the reality that at the moment is hidden. That hidden reality will only be seen again after a time of darkness and fear and death. The threat of being caught up in the spread of an infectious disease is not unlike that. But the present situation in our world is not normal. We look beyond that with the understanding and hope that these present protocols are only temporary

Our Gospel story invites us to use our imagination to enter into the mystery of this vision and to stand and watch in awe as the Jesus we know is transfigured. His form changes. His face, like the face of Moses when he had seen God, is too bright for us to look at. His clothes become as white as light. And with him are two of the great figures of the Old Testament. Seeing Moses, we think of how God spoke to his people through the Law revealed to Moses. Seeing Elijah, we think of how God

spoke to his people over the centuries through his prophets. We remember that there was a mystery about how these two men ended their life on earth. We try to hear what they are saying now to Jesus, but we can only imagine that.

Peter is so excited by what he sees that he wants to somehow capture and hold on to the experience by building three tents. It is then that we become aware of the glory cloud that seems to enfold us. And it is from this cloud that we hear God speak, “This is my Son, the Beloved. He enjoys my favour. Listen to Him”. We can’t bear to look anymore.

The next thing we know is the touch of Jesus’ hand on our shoulder. When we dare to look up it is only Jesus who is there, looking just as we know him. As we walk down the mountain with him, he asks that we tell no one about what we have seen until he has risen from the dead.

We don’t need to use our imagination to know that being a follower of Jesus means walking with him to the cross. That road is often dark and mysterious for us. We often wonder what is happening when we or those we love get struck down by illnesses. We wonder where God is when things don’t work out as we hoped they would. It is then that we best remember that Jesus

did not promise to take away the pain and disappointments that are part of every human life. He just promised to walk with us in whatever situations we are asked to suffer. As people of faith and hope we know that the glory that belongs to Jesus will be ours one day.

But there are transfiguration moments along the way for us too. There may be times when we sense the presence of God with us in a powerful way. There may be times when we are overcome by the beauty of God’s creation. There may be times when we are told how loved we are by someone close to us. There may be times when we know for sure that we are a beloved son or daughter of God our Father. These moments of transfiguration may not last very long, but they become part of our memory. They become part of the memory of faith that we can draw upon when we feel the weight of the crosses we are bearing. We can remember those moments of light when light is hard to find.

Some of us may need to recall moments of transfiguration now as we feel the discomfort of being asked to do things that threaten our devotion. May our faith carry us through these difficult times and allow us to see what is at the heart of our relationship with Jesus, the one whose glory was seen on the mountain.