

## Second Sunday of Lent

I read a book recently called “90 Minutes in Heaven”. It tells of the experience of a Baptist Pastor from the United States who was involved in a terrible road accident and was pronounced dead by the emergency staff who tried to rescue him. It was ninety minutes before he was prayed back to life again. The book tells of what his experience of heaven was like during those ninety minutes. He then faced a long and very painful time of healing and rehabilitation before he could live with some kind of normality. His ministry as a pastor was radically changed by the taste he had of what lay ahead for him at the end of his earthly life.

We could say that the experience of Jesus being transfigured on the mountain was a taste of what lay ahead for him when, after his resurrection, he would take up again the glory that belonged to him as God. It was an experience that was shared with three of his closest disciples. That they were there with Jesus allows us to be there too. With Peter, James and John, we experience the real Jesus. In seeing Jesus in his glory, we see what we shall become with him.

As in any of the gospel stories we are invited to enter more deeply into the story by pondering the images that are being used. Jesus takes us up a high mountain. We can always see a lot more on the top of the mountain. It

is where we might even see God. It was on the mountain of Moriah that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son to God as we saw in today’s reading from the Book of Genesis. Moses and Elijah are there with Jesus reminding us of how God has spoken to his people in the past through the Law and the Prophets. In a land that was so dependent upon regular rainfall clouds became signs of life and hope. Since God is the source of life and the ground for our hope clouds became symbols of God’s presence among us. On the mountain of today’s story, we become lost in the cloud of God’s presence. And God speaks to us from the cloud. “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”

Mark is a master of drama. Immediately after the Father spoke from the cloud we read, “Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. The wonderful experience of the glory of God is taken from them. It is the Jesus with whom they are familiar that they can see now.

But the mystery deepens as they make their way down from the mountain. They are told not to tell anyone about what they had seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. But they didn’t really know what this meant. Jesus was about to tell them that before he could rise from the dead, before he could come to share

the glory that they had just seen, he was going to be rejected, betrayed and die a horrible death.

There is a message for us in all this too. We are on a journey with Jesus. That journey will come to a glorious end when we will be with Jesus in heaven. But like Jesus we will only enjoy the glory of heaven after we have lived our life here on earth with all its joys and struggles, with all its limitations and possibilities, until we too die. We will only be ready to experience the fullness of God's love for us when we have learnt something of what loving means. We will only be ready to let God embrace us in God's loving arms when we have grown out of our selfishness and opened our arms to embrace others. We can only do that with the love and support of others.

In a few moments we are going to have a little ritual for the children preparing to celebrate Confirmation and First Holy Communion this year. We call it a Ritual of Belonging. It is a way of celebrating who these children are and the support that they have been given to grow as people of faith. These children belong first to their own families. It is there that God has loved them first and still loves them best. In their own families they have come to know something of who God is for them.

But all of them belong to a bigger family too. They were baptized into the family that we call the Church; the family that gathers around them now to support them on the next stage of their journey. We are going to hear them say that they belong to our Parish Family here in this place. When we hear them say that, this calls for a response from us. We are called to express our support for them and our prayers for them and their families.

Only when these children have received their First Holy communion will these children become fully initiated into our Church Family. They will still be just beginning to know what it means to be disciples of Jesus. You and I who have been long initiated into the Church know that becoming disciples of Jesus is a life long work. But today's gospel helps us to see the bigger picture. It helps us to know where we are going. The words that God spoke from the cloud help us to know how to get there.

There will be times when we get discouraged. Most of us will get lost many times. But St. Paul today gives us a word of encouragement. He knows that the road can be challenging but he wants us to know that we are never alone. "With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain that after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give." Let's open our hearts to what God may want to give us today.