

The Sunday before Lent – a liturgy for worship at home

Introduction

We read in our Gospel today of the Transfiguration of the Lord, that mystical event on a mountain which took place as Jesus was beginning to turn his attention to his journey to Jerusalem and the cross. In Lent, which begins on Wednesday, we too spiritually make that journey to the cross. As we are given a glimpse today of the resurrection light that follows may we find the strength and reassurance we need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, knowing that whatever befalls us in this life, including death, we are accompanied by a Lord who will never let us go. Let us prepare to meet him again today by reflecting on where we fall short in our Christian life and recognise our continuing need of transformation.

Act of Penitence

Our ways are not always the ways of the Lord. Let us ask the Lord to forgive us and to transform our lives.

Lord Jesus, in our afflictions and trials help us to keep trusting in you:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, we are your servants. Help us to remember that you have set us free from the bonds of sin.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you are God's beloved Son. Help us to listen to you and to follow you more faithfully.
Lord, have mercy.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us for all the ways we fall short in following your way. Show us the light of your face and lead us on the road to everlasting life.
Amen.

Act of Praise

The **Gloria** as follows or some other hymn of praise

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross: give us grace to perceive his glory, that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Today's readings

A reading from the second book of Kings

(2 : 1-12)

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."

So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not."

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept

watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 50: 1 – 6

The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken, and called the world from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth; our God comes and will not keep silence.

Consuming fire goes out before him, and a mighty tempest stirs about him.

He calls the heaven above, and the earth, that he may judge his people.

'Gather to me my faithful, who have sealed my covenant with sacrifice.'

Let the heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (4:3-6)

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Acclamation to greet the Gospel:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

From the bright cloud, the Father's voice was heard:

'This is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (9: 2 – 9)

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

On one of my trips to the Holy Land with a group of pilgrims some years ago, we were driven up the hairpin road to the top of Mount Tabor, 588 metres above sea level. Although it is not the universally agreed scene of the transfiguration of Jesus, it is appropriately located for the event. From Mount Tabor we can imagine Jesus being able to look north to Galilee and review the ministry he had accomplished there; and then to look south, the road to Jerusalem and consider what would await him at the end of his fateful journey. At least, that is according to the Gospel of Luke. Mark and Matthew, on the other hand, tell of Jesus returning to Galilee for a final visit. This could indicate that he had been with his disciples on a different mountain, perhaps Mount Hermon in the north, especially as it is recorded that he was at nearby Caesarea Philippi at few days earlier, in which case he would come back through Galilee before heading south towards Jerusalem.

The Gospels only say that Jesus' transfiguration took place on 'a high mountain.' Mountains are wonderful places. Every step higher brings a wider view of the world below, a wider sense of place and perhaps an expanded sense of time. This

experience invites the mind to a new perspective on life and its directions. The mountain can be a truly spiritual place. No wonder holy people throughout the ages including Moses, Elijah, and Jesus have gone to the mountain for communion with God, and for reflection upon life and mission.

Clearly, for Peter, James and John accompanying Jesus on this mountain provided them with a wonderful experience. But what exactly happened? Like the resurrection which the transfiguration experience appears to foreshadow, the Gospel writers try to put into words something that straightforward language cannot easily contain or explain. For this is one of those intense encounters with God, a spiritual reality, a mystical or visionary experience. A shining face probably best describes the phenomenon which could be visible or objective, but also could be something that the seer alone is able to see with the eyes of insight or perception rather than simple physical sight.

The disciples also hear the voice of God. In the Old Testament, the 'voice of God' is a translation of the Hebrew, '*bath qol*' which literally means 'the daughter of a sound.' It is a voice unlike any other, not necessarily an audible voice at all. We read that Elijah, in his mountain encounter with God, heard God speaking to him through sheer silence, usually translated as 'a still small voice.'

The brief moment of transcendent light and sound called the Transfiguration was for Jesus a reassurance, a strengthening for the day of suffering and death to come. For the disciples too, as these three would be with Jesus in the darkness of the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. They would also be associated with the agonies of the Church in the first decades of its existence. This mystical experience of the presence of God was given to them as encouragement for the challenging weeks and years ahead, even though they found it frightening at the time. Such experiences are rare so a sense of fear would be natural.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage, a walk with the Lord. Sometimes, most times perhaps, our walk is in the seemingly rather barren wilderness of everyday routines and concerns, and sometimes the road is difficult and uncertain. But sometimes we are drawn to the mountain of prayer and to the experience of light, perspective, connections, sureness and deep peace. It may be on an actual mountain, or it might just be in a room at home. It may come in the normal course of our worship in church, for worship invites an encounter with God. The prolific and versatile writer, Alfred Noyes, once said, 'If ever I had any doubts about the truth of Christianity, they could always be dispelled by one memory – the light upon my father's face as he returned from early morning Holy Communion.'

Of course, in the Christian life we are not to be obsessed with signs or lights or voices from heaven. We have the teaching of Jesus himself to forbid it. But when we are focused, spiritually open and ready, God does grant us those moments of light, insight, assurance, to encourage us in the present and strengthen us for the future. Those moments, those days on the mountain are to be treasured. When God reveals the light of his presence we must receive it and own it. But we must remember most of all that it has been given to us in order that we may glow when we come down from our mountain, our spiritual height, so that we may reflect the glory and the presence of God: not necessarily with physically shining faces, but certainly enlightened, transformed, and more confident and committed in our walk with Christ our Lord. And, what is more, becoming better people, who can encourage, and bring peace and joy to those we encounter, those we relate to day by day. Then they too may see something of the light, the presence of God and be drawn to it.

Let us now walk hopefully and prayerfully into the pilgrimage which is Lent, a time when most of all we are called to focus on our journey of life and our walk with the Lord, as we follow his journey to the cross and the resurrection glory that lies beyond it.

A few moments of silent reflection are recommended.

The Profession of Faith, *either the following or one of the traditional creeds:*

We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us bring our prayers to God, whose glory is revealed through the Church to all the world; trusting in his steadfast love and in his willingness always to hear us when we call on his name.

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

We pray for the church worldwide that your wonderful light may transfigure us all, changing human weakness into divine strength. May your church remain faithful to

the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and proclaim that Gospel to people of all nations. May they keep faithful to the mission of preaching and healing in our generation as did those who went before us in faith.

We pray for God's world with all its needs and hurts and for ourselves that we may respond to those needs with compassion and generosity. We ask your blessing on our Bishops Robert and David and all who minister within our Diocese and our church of St. Francis. We pray especially today for Canon Medhat Sabry, our Area Dean, as he is licenced to his new ministry in Madrid, giving thanks for his years of faithful service in Casablanca.

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

We pray Lord that your wisdom will be made known in the governments of the world, that good decisions will be made for the health, the economy and the peace of the people.

We pray for those in our communities and neighbourhoods, especially as they deal with lost employment and are suffering hardship. We pray that God's steadfast love may be made known to them by the way in which we live and in the way in which we serve and help them.

We ask for your continued blessing on our church charity shop, Margaret and all the volunteers. We remember, too, the helping charities in Tenerife, including Happy-to-Help, Noah's Ark and Caritas.

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

We pray for all who are in need of God's healing and peace that they may know God's presence surrounding them in their pain and distress. We especially lift to you in a moment of silent prayer those we know who need your healing touch, remembering Margaret Rainton, Petrina Thompson and Carol Hart.

We pray for all medical services under the stress of coping with the ongoing Corona virus and ask that they be given strength and endurance.

Lord, hear usLord, Graciously hear us

Have mercy on all who have suffered the loss of ones they love and miss. Comfort them with the assurance of new life to come.

Lord God, our heavenly Father, we offer these prayers to you now. We ask that through them and the prayers of all your people your will may be done in this church and throughout the world, in our lives and in the lives of all for whom we have prayed.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us pray with all trust the prayer of Jesus our Lord:

Our Father.....

You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.
May your body and blood be my food and drink.
May your passion and death by my strength and life.
Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.
May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.
Let me not run from the love which you offer
but hold me safe from the forces of evil.
On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.
Keep calling to me until that day comes
when, with your saints, I may praise you for ever. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ: may we who have received him into our hearts today reflect his life in word and deed, that all the world may know his power to change and save. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Blessing

Christ Jesus, the splendour of the Father and the image of his being, draw you to himself that you may live in his light and share his glory: and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you, and with those you love and pray for, today and always. Amen.

Let us walk with one another the Lord's way of love and peace. Thanks be to God.

