

## Lent 2A SFX 2022

It must have been a tough climb for the disciples. Where was Jesus leading them. He had begun to talk about his suffering and death. What had he called them to? They must have felt like Abraham had receiving a call to make a leap into the unknown. Where were they being led? *Rabbi, are you truly the one to bring salvation to the people?*

But then on the mountain he was transfigured. *"His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light."* In that moment they saw Jesus in all his glory, in all his loveliness, in all his beauty. His divinity shone through. And Peter cries out: *"It is good for us to be here..."*

This vision was not for Jesus it was for *them*. To be reassured in their present struggles and confusion. They also heard a voice from heaven. The words here and at Jesus' baptism are almost identical, so once again we hear the only thing that the Father is ever recorded as saying in the New Testament. *"This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him."*

The words of comfort may also have brought a shiver down their spines, for **only once** in the Old Testament is the phrase *My Son, the beloved* used, and that is in the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac. *Take your son, your only child ... your beloved ... and offer him.* But here we have a hint of a new sacrifice, not of Abraham, but of Jesus, of God himself.

We can think of the Transfiguration as a lesson about sacrificial love, because as Jesus talked of the cross and suffering, in this moment they saw beyond the Cross to the glory. In Lent we learn to deny ourselves, give ourselves a bit more to others. In each small death to self we endure in love for the other we embrace the Cross - the only gateway to risen life. That is the path of sacrificial love that Jesus teaches.

St Paul understood that the transfiguration was not something that just happened to Jesus, but happens in us too. But might remember that once we were clothed in white, we shone like Christ on that mountain when we were baptised and wrapped in that bright white shawl. It was an outward sign of what was happening within.

St Paul says that in the process of dying to the old Adam, as we try to do in Lent, we **are** being transformed into a new reality, as Jesus was transformed in a body like ours. *We all with unveiled faces, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another. (2 Cor 3:18)*

We might struggle to see any hint of glory in ourselves. But we are being transfigured, changed, transformed, as we struggle with the daily realities of human existence. Change is happening because we are not alone in this. Through our baptism we are plunged into the Paschal Mystery of Christ himself dying and rising in us. Paul says again: *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. (2 Cor 4:16)* So in Lent we try to let go of the old self and put on the new reality of Christ.

You might remember that when Moses came down Mount Sinai he **did not know his face was radiant** after speaking with the Lord, but it **shone with the glory** of what he had seen, so they covered his face with a veil. Did Peter's face shine when he came down from Tabor? Do our faces shine when we return to our seats after communion, brought into contact for a brief moment with this mystery of the unseen God that was revealed at Tabor. At times we are not aware that the mystery of Christ is at work in us, *is transforming us, is transfiguring us*. It is something that always wants to be at work in us,

Coming back from South America, one or two people said to me that my face was glowing just a bit, perhaps from the sun. It was certainly an amazing trip for me. I climbed the highest I have ever been, up in the Andes to Macu Piccu in Peru. I went the furthest South, to the remote region of Patagonia in Chile. I saw prehistoric temples and pyramids, Inca culture and Spanish Colonial cities. Gaucho rodeos with emotional tango singing. I saw some fabulous, amazing things.

But what will stay with me most are the three Christian communities that I stayed with our own monastery in Peru, and two lay-communities in Chile. The final community I visited in Patagonia gave me a great start to Lent. It took a 3-hour flight and a six hour drive on a bumpy untarmacked road to get there. Without electricity or internet they live in the natural rhythm of the day. Remote as they are, they live close to the earth amongst the tango-singing gaucho cowboys. They are a young community and their main work is with students that come from university or the three schools that they run in the capital Santiago – over 5000 pupils. They described their work as creating a space for the young to encounter God and be transformed. It was good to see the faith alive in the remotest of lands, where with the locals they see a priest only every couple of months.

I worked a bit on their farm watering the fields and spreading the muck. We woke at dawn to pray to the light of a candle, again in the evening and at night. They spend an hour each day seeking life from the Scriptures. What I will remember is the warmth, the joy, the love they shared and lived. There is nothing more beautiful than a Christian community transfigured by the love of God, and I met it there in a very real way.

I don't want to exaggerate, but I don't think I have seen a community so embodying the Gospel. Settlers had got to those parts only a hundred years ago. As they turned their bit of barren land into a garden, their own lives were being transfigured too. Love amongst the weeds and the thorns of Patagonia.

It was a good lesson for the beginning of Lent. To stay close to the earth, close to the rhythm of the days, close to the Scriptures that inspire us, and most of all close to Christ and rooted in the love of God that inspires us. And we want to be that here in Hereford, a community transfigured by the love of Christ, shining his face in the world around us. It was good to be there, but it good also to be back here. May God help all of us to live this Lent well.