

Pro Cathedral Church of Holy Trinity Brussels

Sunday before Lent (Quinquagesima)

Lectionary: Exodus 24:12-end; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-end; Matthew 17: 1-9.

Theme: Transfiguration of Jesus

The Incarnation of Our Lord and the Transfiguration of Our Lord come at the beginning and end of the Christmas and Epiphany seasons respectively. Both Christological festivals complement each other in very striking ways. In the Incarnation, the divine partakes of the human condition, whereas in the Transfiguration, the human shares in divine glory. In the Incarnation, the Son of God takes on human form and resides with us mortals on this planet earth. In the Transfiguration, the earthly Jesus shares for a moment the company of two great residents of heaven, Moses and Elijah, and with his disciples as witnesses.

For Peter, James and John, being invited to the mountain was not going to be a new thing. They must have had experiences and stories of different mountains. At least, they listened to the Sermon on the Mount. They probably will recall the story of Abraham who took Isaac to the mountain for sacrifice, the place where God himself provided a lamb for sacrifice. They would also have known the story of Moses and Joshua on the mountain, where after six days, the glory of God (like in the transfiguration) filled the mountain top, and God spoke to Moses, giving him the words of his covenant with the people. (Ex 24:13-18). If not from experience, at least they must have known from historical texts that mountains are places of special revelation and encounter. Both Moses and Elijah had received revelations on mountains. Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). Elijah fled to Mount Horeb, and there God spoke to him in 'a still small voice' (1 Kings 19:12). It is these two men that appeared on the mountain with Jesus and his companions. Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Jesus. They were speaking of the departure of Jesus which was soon to be accomplished in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31): his departure from this world through his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven: the place where they themselves Moses and Elijah dwell with God. Jesus had earlier predicted his suffering: that the son of man must suffer many things, be rejected, killed, and on the third day be raised to life (Lk 9:22). Because Moses and Elijah have become part of the heavenly assembly, so they know the mind and will of God. They confirm that this is the will of God for him- the way to glory. The way to glory cannot bypass the cross and the mountain.

For Peter, James and John, this mountain to which Jesus invites them, what kind of experience will it bring them? What will they encounter? Am not sure if they questioned Jesus on what they were going there to do. What happens there? The appearance of Jesus changed, his face shinning like the sun, his clothes became as white as the light, Moses and Elijah appeared and began that conversation with Jesus; and more.... Peter says, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here, if you wish, I will put up three shelters- one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'. And why does Peter suggest building three tents? Because something unusual, something powerful must be happening here on this mountain; something the apostles could not fully or even partly comprehend, something very difficult to explain. For Peter, he tries to speak about it, using his own words to explain the unspeakable! It was absolutely unspeakable! He had no camera to take photos of the event and what he was seeing. He felt like capturing the event somehow, to domesticate this frightening and divine experience, to make an album of it, for proper safekeeping and for memory. But, as Peter was

still speaking, a voice from the clouds came! God's voice interrupted his attempt to explain and to capture the unspeakable. "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him". Sometimes, in some situations and challenges that we face or pass through, it is best to be quiet and to listen. God might have something to say! Sometimes, only God knows the events and challenges of our lives. If the events and challenges of our life are beyond our understanding, if they are frightening, difficult and unspeakable, God might have something to say. Listen and be quiet, so that you may be able to hear God. Even in our surprise and disappointments, God voice could still be interrupting, and saying to us, 'listen'!

In verses 6-7, when the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." The words of Jesus and his gentle touch became a sign of healing and comfort for their fears. This assures us that, no matter the situation, the challenge, God is in control. In our individual lives, we have our moments and experiences of being on top of the mountain. Our transfiguration and mountain top experience could be our health situation- that health issue that we do not comprehend, or loneliness, or joblessness, or immigration challenges, financial insecurity, or things known to you or I alone, the words of Jesus, his gentle touch is enough to bring us healing and comfort. Last week's reading encouraged us not to worry or to be fearful of the future (Matt 6:25-34). Jesus assures us that both our now and our future are secure in his hands!

Over the past weeks in North Africa (from one country to another), the events are indeed sad events. But God could be using these difficult events to transfigure these nations. Transfiguration is about change, seeing another side of something, perhaps something better and more glorious than the former. If God is at work, let's keep watch and pray. This mysterious and divine experience on the mountain is not only about the transfiguration of Jesus. It is equally the transfiguration of Peter, James and John. It points also to our individual, family, community and national transfiguration. This story helps us to understand our own story in the light divine transfiguration. The experiences and challenges of our life are processes that could transfigure us. These experiences (like those of the apostles) might be difficult to comprehend. They might be unpleasant and terrifying, but God could be using the events and experiences to transfigure us.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord gives us a glimpse of the coming future glory of Christ on Easter. But it also reminds us that the way to Easter is through the cross and the mountain. Very shortly, Jesus would 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' where all that has been spoken of, will take place for him. It is not going to be a journey of milk & chocolates! And for us as a believing and worshiping community, my dear people of God, Lent begins on Wednesday this week with Ash Wednesday service at 8p.m. What spiritual preparation are we going to make at this time of lent? Jane and David Brown have helped us to put together our lent meditations as they did during Advent. Shall we forget, and not bring to mind, the suffering, passion, agony and bloody sweat, and death of our dearest Lord, redeemer and friend? Shall we not use this time to pray and to strengthen ourselves, and to say:

*... Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me: hide me within your wounds
and never let me be separated from you.... Amen*

Augustine Nwaekwe