

# Last Sunday after Epiphany Yc 25 Transfiguration

## Homily

Let us pray, O God, Heavenly Father, as we reflect upon what we hear in the Scriptures in our lives. May we come to a deeper experience of revelation you give to us of yourself in Jesus. Through Him in the guiding and leading of the Holy Spirit. May we grow in love and be led into all truth. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Well, today I'm going to lead a reflection on the Transfiguration.

One of the factors in the life of church or one of the things that happens from time to time is that you never know when children will be present. Although I had some warning about 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon that two of my grandchildren, Spencer and Oscar, were coming. And then of course I saw Ben and Catherine pull up with Cooper and Jordan.

Now, Jordan doesn't quite come into my range of communication yet, not in terms of words anyway. I mean spiritually, yes, but not in words. So today we just pause for a few moments as I share something with our younger people.

Today we celebrate one of the great, great moments in Jesus' life. Jesus was born, as you know when we celebrate Christmas, he was born in Bethlehem and Christians believe he actually God who became a human being.

Well, we have a few stories of him growing up, just a couple. And then he appears when he's about 30. And John, who's a pretty amazing-looking character as far as we're concerned, he just wore things like a camel skin and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Now that's for lunchtime. That's for lunch incidentally, locusts and wild honey. And he was saying, people prepare the way for God, for the coming of God, to make straight the way of the world.

And then Jesus turned up and asked to be baptized by him. And John recognized him as being the one that he was preparing for. And he said to him, look, I shouldn't baptize you, you should baptize me. But Jesus said, no, it will be as it is according to the law. So Jesus was baptized by John. And when Luke said, when he was praying afterwards, suddenly the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended upon him who'd probably fall like a dove and hovered above his head.

And a voice from heaven was heard saying, this is my beloved with whom I am well pleased. Now that's a pretty dramatic thing to happen. Now we don't know how many people saw that happen, but we know John the Baptist did.

Anyway, Jesus from there started moving amongst people, doing amazing things, teaching people, healing people, healing blind people. And he was building up a lot of people who thought he was the Messiah; he was the one that God sent. And we come to this moment today when Jesus started talking about the fact that he was going to die on the cross, and that he would rise from the dead.

And that happened just before this. Also just before this, he'd asked the disciples, who did you say I am? Who do people say I am? And they said, John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets, but John was dead by this time and he was beheaded by Herod. Anyway, and then he said to the disciples, who do you say I am? And Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus said, well you Peter, are the rock on which I am going to build my church. So this has been building up. So in today's story, Peter, James and John go up on a high mountain with Jesus, and that was often the place they went to pray.

I've been looking for a high mountain since, but I've got to go up to the hills of Erica and even further to get the real high mountain. So I'm not doing that. They went up the mountain to pray, and suddenly Jesus, his whole appearance changed.

His face shone like light, and his clothes went bright and radiated energy. And then suddenly there was two people, Moses who had died about 1200 years before Christ, and Elijah who had been taken out to heaven about 600 years before Christ. They appeared and were talking to him.

And then this cloud came over them, as we heard, and the disciples said, oh, we're frightened of this, yet that was one way that God appeared in the Bible, was a cloud.

In the Old Testament, we're told that when the people of Israel were wandering through the wilderness, God, was this cloud, would lead them by day. So the cloud came over them, and this voice again came and said, this is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him.

So that's an incredible story, which we now, as adults, are going to explore. You can listen, but you can also think about it if you want to, because I have here sort of a representation of it, which you can colour if you wish, but you don't need to. You can also take it home.

Well, that, together with the hymns, gives us half the sermon.

Today, as I said, we're on sacred ground as we come to celebrate the Transfiguration of Jesus. And each of the readings is pivotal, but our main focus, of course, is the story of his Transfiguration.

And there are various events in the life of Christ that are revelatory. But as I indicated, his birth, then his baptism, and then the Transfiguration are absolutely pivotal in terms of us coming to a deeper experience of who Christ is and who we are in him. I guess we all could pause for a moment.

I mean, as Christians, we tend to just assume, of course, it happened. But would you believe there are commentators that say, no, it's more a mythological story, something like that couldn't really happen. So if we ask the question, did it happen, we have our own faith in Jesus that will trust it did.

And we might also then ask the question, well, what are the implications if it didn't happen? And would it be, as I suggested, mythology? But Peter, in his letter, says it did happen. He said,

for we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved,<sup>10</sup> with whom I am well pleased.” **18** We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

We ourselves heard this voice coming from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain. Isn't that amazing? And so that's a testimony to the fact that this did happen.

So they're praying, and that reminds us of the importance of prayer. And as I said to young people, Jesus' face was changed, transfigured in some of the accounts. What he actually looked like, I guess, is something for us to pray and try and imagine.

And his clothes shone brighter than any light. And of course there are different descriptions, slightly in the Gospels. In Luke he says, The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

In Matthew he says, And he was transfigured before them, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white. And in Mark, And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. So to try and explore what happened then is part of our spiritual journey.

And there is the reference to Moses, of course. We have the Old Testament reading that said when Moses went up the mountain and came back down, they would see his face changed. And in fact the people of Israel couldn't even really look at it.

So he used to have to veil it.

But with Jesus we're taken into a deeper place, as Paul said in the reading we have today, where he says that, in a sense, we are unveiled in Christ and we can see into the deeper glory of God in Christ because of him. So as we explore what actually happened in this transfiguration, it's important for a moment just to go back to the baptism and explore the similarities and the differences between what happened at the baptism and what happened here.

So at the baptism as I said, to the young people, the spirit came down upon him, hovered above his head, and the voice spoke from heaven. Here, there's no spirit coming down, it just radiates divine energy. Now, some people say that what he manifested was his very nature as the Son of God becoming a human being.

In other words, all, just for a moment, they saw the glory of who Jesus really was and is and, of course, will be. In fact, he always is, is more inclusive.

But there's another train of thought that says that just as he had to be baptised, for our sake really, and remember, his being baptised, as I've been trying to indicate, is a model of our journey in Christ when the Spirit comes down upon us and clothes us and we are slowly transformed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. So with Jesus, the Spirit coming down upon him, here now we see that his clothes radiate this divine energy. And there's a whole theme that we can go into about being clothed with the Holy Spirit, being clothed with righteousness, being clothed with the heavenly man.

But we do really need to remember that last week and the week before, in Paul's 1 Corinthians, we talked about how we have both a physical body and a spiritual body. The first Adam is a living being, the second Adam is a life-giving spirit. One died, all died, so in Christ all have been raised to life.

That we have this spiritual body, and that's why the clothes shone with this radiance, because the spiritual body, and you know people talk about auras, and we think, a lot of us might think, oh that's New Age stuff. It's not. Not New Age stuff at all.

It's fundamental to our very life in Christ, is that we have a physical body and a spiritual body. And Paul says the physical comes first and then the spiritual. And as we age, and I've said this before, we become more and more our spiritual body.

So here, Jesus manifests his, if you like, totally spiritualized humanity, as the Orthodox Christians would say, that he's now fully indwelt in his humanity by the Holy Spirit, and that's the glory that's manifest. But of course that says something about who we are becoming Christ through his death and resurrection. When the Orthodox say he's fully indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they call the process what they describe as theosis, which is being divinized.

Now I jokingly say, because I went on a bit of a long trip, and I didn't go on with being a lawyer, and decided to seek truth, and studied for some 12 years before I became a priest. And in that journey, I studied a lot of Eastern religion, so I used to think, all right, by this age I should be enlightened. Well, I don't know what's gone wrong.

But anyway, I'm still walking the path, although perhaps I've got more enlightenment than I think. But I certainly don't have the holiness I would hope that I've had by now. But it just shows perhaps that the journey's a bit longer, and that's a transformation that might have to take place, or will take place, after death.

But it is still a part that shows us what we are becoming Christ, who he is, who Jesus is, and what we are becoming Christ. And that involves more, as we explore, the appearance of Moses and Elijah. It Luke says they appeared in glory.

Now, how did they recognize Moses and Elijah? No cameras in those days. No paintings, I don't think. I joke and you always say, did they have their parish name tag on? Probably not.

So how did they recognize Moses and Elijah? Because that says something about the spiritual knowing that takes place in heaven. Because they appear in glory. Now, one of the things that's always puzzled me about this is that, remember Peter says how Jesus, after he died, descended into the world of the dead, and preached to all who died in the flood, and to all the imprisoned spirits.

Now, we have to say, alright, did people go to heaven before Jesus opened the gates of heaven? Did people go to heaven before Jesus opened the gates of heaven? Now, I'm of the opinion they didn't. They lived in the world of the dead. For example, when Saul went to the witch of Endor, he summoned up the spirit of Samuel to speak to him, which was not a thing that was really appropriate to do.

But Samuel came out of the world of the dead. Now, I'd like to suggest that what's happening here, and remember this is just my reflection, but there are lots of different opinions about it, so at least I can say something about what I've explored in this, that in fact, we see Moses and Elijah appear because they are pointing to what was to come through Jesus' death and resurrection. The glory then is to come through Jesus dying and rising from the dead.

So that is what they are going to become through his death and resurrection. But they also represent that Jesus is fulfilling both the law and the prophets, and ultimately culminates in Jesus. Now, why is this important? It's important for us because, one, I think that although they didn't have their parish name tags on, that we are recognisable after we've died.

And that becomes a very important thing for all of us as we think about our eternal destiny, and to see them in their glorified state. And it suggests that we too are going to be glorified, that we will become the person that we truly are. Bishop Arthur Jones used to say that when you die you become what you are on the inside.

Now, not necessarily for us here, but for some maybe we need some sort of process of transformation even after we die. But this is our ultimate hope, that we are to be glorified and become this beautiful radiant being that God has created us to be. So there's a lot for us to reflect upon in the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing.

Now, of course, they weren't there at the baptism as far as we know, unless they were peeking around the corner or something, but maybe not. We won't add that in. But then we come to more of the similarities.

Although there was no cloud, remember I said to young people that the cloud, that God led by a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire by night, when the people of Israel were going through the wilderness. But the cloud is one way that God manifested. When Moses went up on the mountain, he went up into a cloud.

And when they dedicated the Temple of Solomon, the glory of God came down in, would you believe, a dark cloud. In fact, all the priests had to get out. I don't know what that says about the priests, but anyway, that's another matter.

So this God manifesting in a cloud, if you think about it, if God's invisible, what's the closest thing to invisibility? It's just like the energy of a cloud, isn't it? I mean, really stop and think. If you stop and look at what's here [in this place], apart from the solid objects, there is an energy in the air. I mean, we think it might be a vague eyesight, but there is always a sense of energy.

And at night, can't you often see, although it's dark in your room, there's a sense of, there's energy, because there's oxygen, there's, you know, we live in an atmosphere of energy, which gravity is a part of. So God can appear in that way just by becoming a more intense energy, which can be described as being like a cloud. And, of course, what is similar is, again, as at the baptism is the voice from heaven, although the words are slightly different, affirming who Jesus is.

So this sets the pattern for us, because we also know that this transfiguration takes place. That's the last great moment of revelation of who Jesus is, and now he begins to set himself to Jerusalem, he would start speaking of his death and resurrection. And so that really sets the tone for us, as we now come to Lent.

I said to Julie this morning, because if my sermon is slightly disorganized, you won't want to know what's happened in the last 24 hours, apart from the fact that the newsletter takes a lot of pulling together at the last minute. And I'm very appreciative for Graham Nichols and Stephen Heath running it off to half past 10 at night. But anyway, we made it by the first Sunday of the month again.

But also this morning as I'm putting my sermon together, which was a bit hasty in preparation anyway, I suddenly found my emails were not working, which is a sign of possibly being hacked. So do you go to church in peace of mind and say, I trust God that he'll look after my hacked emails, or do I do something about it, or do I do something about it? So of course I had to change passwords and do a whole lot of things when I should have been finishing my sermon off. But I said to Julie, that's a bit like the transfiguration followed by Jesus' crucifixion.

I have this great moment of glory, but then Jesus heads off doing all sorts of amazing things but on the road to the ultimate chaos, and yet the road that leads to new life. And that happens in our lives, doesn't it? You have a moment of great insight, and then suddenly things seem to fall apart. And we wonder what's happening.

But in fact it's a pattern of our human life as we are being transformed, growing closer to God.

So now as we do look towards Lent, so like Jesus in the transfiguration, now we look to the cross. Lent begins this Wednesday.

So now we take the journey to the cross with the Epiphany and the light of his glory to encourage us on our way. We journey to the cross, we turn with Jesus to Jerusalem. For us we go through the desert, but just remember whatever we decide to do in Lent, and I suggest that the most important thing to do is try and be what you should be.

Try and be who you really are, who you really need to be. In other words, focus on being your true self. And whatever you might have to give up to do that, do that.

But most of all, this is not a time of deprivation in a sense, this is a time of growth and development. So I suggest that the most important thing about Lent is the discipline of trying to be your true self and exploring what that means. So we don't worry so much about giving up things, but making sure that we just leave out the things that diminish our life and restrict our spiritual journey.

And let's be mindful as we walk this way towards Jerusalem, the journey through Lent, that we are joined with millions and millions of Christians around the world, all of whom are trying to give greater focus in the next 48 days to their spiritual growth and development. And that's why some people say, oh, I don't like Lent, it's so penitential. I love Lent, because

it's a deeper time, spiritually, when so many people are focusing on their spiritual growth and development all around the world.

And so that really makes it a wonderful time, in a sense, as we all seek to grow in the Spirit, to be sanctified by God, to become who He created us to be.

Let's pray. Lord God, heavenly father, we pray that as we now prepare to walk through the desert with Jesus, to walk through the time of Lent, to Calvary and His resurrection into new life, that the revelation of Christ and the Transfiguration will inspire us on our journey and lead us into a deeper experience and belief of the power in Jesus' death and resurrection to transform us and human life, and that we share that journey together.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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