

Transfiguration

6 3 11

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.

My text today is Matthew chapter 7 and verse 2: 'He was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.'

How do we make sense of reality ? How do we know what's going on around us ?
How do we know what's true, what's real, what's certain ?

Thank God we have our senses. Most of us have all five: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. Our five senses provide us with an incredible amount of data and in processing that data, we can evaluate most things. Take French bread for example, my daily diet. I often buy a baguette from the boulangerie in Levassasseur. It is good bread. For a start, I can smell it as I walk into the shop. I can see it, crusty light brown, stacked upright on the shelf. As I take it from one of the girls, it is firm and sometimes warm. Back in the flat, it tastes delicious spread with Breton butter. I can buy French bread in Tesco's in Potters Bar but it's not as good as the real thing !

Jesus is the real thing. In Epiphany, in the course of five sermons, we saw that God was made manifest in his Son, Jesus Christ. Today, on the Sunday next before Lent, we can see in the Transfiguration one more way that God reveals Jesus to be the Christ, his Son, the Beloved.

The Transfiguration is a description of something extraordinary, something so far out of the ordinary that it might be termed supernatural. It occurs on a high mountain – possibly Mount Tabor but probably Mount Hermon towering some six thousand feet above the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has taken three of his disciples with him: the inner circle of Peter, James and John. There, on that mountainside, high up above the plain below, Jesus is transfigured.

Transfiguration like transformation suggests a change, a metamorphosis. What is changed is Jesus' outward appearance. In some Renaissance paintings depicting the Nativity, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds are gathered round the manger in the stable at night but despite the shadowy background, their faces are bathed in light. Where is the light coming from? The source of light is the baby Jesus looking up at them.

Now, here, Peter, James and John are privileged to see with their own eyes something of the true appearance, the real nature of Christ. The man they know who looks just like them: a black-haired, olive-skinned Jew, dressed in drab, dusty, travel-stained robes is revealed to be radiant. His face shines like the sun; his clothes are dazzling white. In those two images of brightness, we have something of the intensity of light that Jesus is radiating. One of the

Christological titles of Jesus is the 'Light of the World'. Here three disciples are privileged to see what that might mean in reality.

So the three see Jesus as he is. Then they hear confirmation of what they see. On that mountain, they are overshadowed by a bright cloud, the Shekinah, the cloud of the presence of God. And from that cloud, a voice which says in words echoing those God the Father pronounced at the Baptism of Jesus: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him.' The words are confirmation of who Jesus is, of his relationship with God the Father and of what our response to him ought to be - that we should listen to him.

'Listen' is a great verb. In this instance, it means more than simply paying attention, hearing what is being said to us. It means taking on board what is said and acting on it. It means we should be informed by the words of Jesus and that we should go and put his words into practice.

So this morning, we are privileged in the Transfiguration to see something of the true nature of Jesus: underneath the appearance of the man, we have an insight into God. Jesus is not only our friend, our brother, our teacher, he is also our Lord and our God. The glory which Jesus set aside at his Incarnation has been glimpsed by us in his Transfiguration. Today, as we look forward to Ash Wednesday and the forty days of Lent leading up to Holy Week and Easter, we have been granted an insight into our Lord and Saviour, confirmed by what we see and by what we hear. May we have the sense to respond appropriately and to 'listen to him'.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

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H: Sermon 23: Transfiguration

