

LIVING THE TRANSFIGURATION

Exodus 34. 29-35
2 Corinthians 3. 12-4. 2
Luke 9. 28-43

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

St Luke's account of the transfiguration is one of the richest and most evocative scenes given in the gospels. Here, we have before us a description of a true 'mountain-top experience', if ever there was one. Our Lord has taken Peter, James and John up the mountain with him to pray. Which mountain? We do not know. Some have thought that it was part of Mount Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi; others believe that the mountain was Mount Tabor, near Jerusalem.¹

In St Luke's story, the transfiguration is narrated only briefly. St Luke does not mention a total metamorphosis, as St Mark does in his gospel. St Luke simply states that while Jesus was praying, 'the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.' This is enough, however, for us to understand: the transfiguration is an awesome disclosure of our Lord's divinity as God's Son.

According to St John of Damascus, at the moment of transfiguration Christ 'was not assuming something that he was not, nor changing into something which he was not, but manifesting what he *was* to his own disciples.' And as another Church Father has written, 'Jesus did not become what he was not already, but appeared to the disciples as he (really) was, opening their eyes, giving sight to those who were blind.'

¹ The significance of the location may actually lie more in its parallel with the experience of Moses and Elijah and Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb.

There are times in our lives, aren't there, when we look around and wonder, 'Is this all there is?' Sometimes it's just a passing question; and at other times it's for a season. We look at our life, our circumstances, and we want more. There is a restlessness, a searching, and longing for something else. Some call it a mid-life crisis. It can make us do surprising things – this searching and seeking. We get a new job, a new car, a new relationship. Or maybe we take up a new hobby, go on a trip, or work extra hours.

The truth is that it's not about the circumstances of life. It's about us. This restlessness, this desire for something more, generally means that we have been living life at the shallow end of the pool. We have been skimming across the surface. In some ways life at the surface is easier, because it is encouraged and rewarded by much of the world today.

Life at the surface keeps us judging circumstances. We look at our circumstances as if they were a picture. If the picture is pretty and pleasing, and if it shows us what we want to see, then God is good and life is as it should be. When we don't see what we want, then we often look for a new picture. Our searching and our longing for more are not, however, usually satisfied by changed circumstances. The real solution is to be found in the depth and intimacy of an interior walk with God.

In actual fact, we do not need to see new things. We need to see the same old things with new eyes. We do not need to hear a different voice. We need to hear the same old voice with different ears. We do not need to escape the circumstances of our life. We need to be more fully present to those circumstances; and to see God as being with us and leading us as we live them.

When this happens, life is no longer lived at the surface. We then begin to live transfigured moments, moments when the picture of our life actually becomes a window into a new way of living and being.

To be fair, I think that most of us seek God in the circumstances of our lives. We do want God to show up, to be present and to do something. We look for the God who *does*. This is the God who is described in Luke's gospel up to the point of today's reading. We might say that this perception of God is the first part of our spiritual journey. It is the journey of *discovering God in our circumstances*. This is what the disciples have been doing up to now.

They have seen Christ cast out demons; they have seen him heal Peter's mother-in-law; they have seen him cure the sick at Capernaum. He has cleansed the leper and made a withered hand new and strong. Paralytics now walk; the blind see; and thousands are fed. This is the God about whom people talk, the God that would get 'likes' and 'shares' on Facebook.

At some point, however, we (like the disciples) must begin to discover the God who *is*. This is the second part of our spiritual journey. Our Lord leads Peter, James and John, up the mountain to discover the God who *is*; *and the God who is beyond all circumstances*. On the Mount of the Transfiguration, the disciples' pictures of life's circumstances change radically as they gain a new awareness of the God who *is* the source of all meaning to life; of the God who *is* the source of light and love.

On the Mount of the Transfiguration, the disciples' eyes were opened, and they saw our Lord as he has always been. The disciples' ears were opened, and they heard the divine voice that has never ceased speaking from the beginning. The story of the Transfiguration is as much about the disciples as it is about Jesus; and the story of the Transfiguration is as much about you and me, as it is about our Lord.

Whenever we begin to see and hear God differently, our picture of life's circumstances changes, because that picture becomes a window to our new life in God. We stand in a transfigured moment. It isn't our circumstances that have changed; it is *we* who have changed; and that seems to change everything. We live 'transfigured' moments; and we begin to see that they are all around us.

Think, for example, of those moments when you have held a small baby in your arms, and suddenly sensed the miracle and mystery of God's creation as never before. Think of those moments when you have been simply awestruck by a place of physical beauty, and said to yourself, 'Only God could have done this.' Think of those moments when, in spite of everything you said or did, you received divine forgiveness and were amazed by the incredible grace of the Father. Lastly, think of those precious moments when, as you sat in the deep silence of God's presence, you knew without a doubt that you are loved by him, unconditionally and for ever.

Often, we want to go back to those transfigured moments. Like Peter, we are tempted to build dwellings for those moments. But if we build such dwellings, they may keep us in the past. And to the extent that we cling to the past, we close ourselves to the future that God offers. So our text tells us that Jesus, Peter, John and James came back down the mountain. They could not stay there; but neither did they actually leave the mountain. *They took it with them.* That mountain-top experience would carry them through the passion and crucifixion to the resurrection.

Transfigured moments change us, sustain us, and prepare us; they encourage us and guide us into the future, regardless of the circumstances we currently face. Transfigured moments show us not only who God is, but who we are. For you may not realise it, but we are all called to be the transfigured people of God. Let us open our ears and hear his transfiguring voice. Let us open our hearts and receive his transfiguring love. Let us resolve to live transfigured lives. Amen.