

CHANGED FROM GLORY TO GLORY

Exodus 34. 29-35

2 Corinthians 3. 12 – 4. 2

Luke 9. 28-36

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

In English, the word ‘glorious’ is a very powerful and expressive word. Recently, we’ve heard people on the island saying, ‘What glorious weather we’ve been having!’ (and it’s very unusual to hear such a comment in Guernsey during the month of February). We speak of ‘glorious sunsets’; and of the ‘glorious’ colours of firework displays. At school, some of our children or grandchildren, when studying English history, may have been looking at the story of the *HMS Glorious*, a battlecruiser built for the Royal Navy in the First World War and which was reconverted and then destroyed by the Germans in the Second World War. Or they may have been considering the ‘Glorious’ Revolution, otherwise known as the Revolution of 1688. That revolution resulted in the deposition of James II and the accession to the throne of his daughter Mary II and her husband, William III, prince of Orange.

As expressive as it is, the word ‘glory’ in English does little to convey the depth and complexity of God’s glory, which is referred to directly or indirectly in our three appointed Scripture readings for today and described by a number of different words in the Bible.¹

In our Old Testament reading we encounter Moses. Moses yearned to see God’s glory, and was allowed by God to glimpse some of it on Mount Sinai. Being close to God changed not only the character of Moses, but also changed his outward

¹ In Hebrew for example, the words used for God’s glory are derived from the words meaning ‘heavy’ and ‘luminous and radiant’. In Greek, the word used for God’s glory refers to the splendour, radiance, majesty and pre-eminence of God.

appearance. The glory of God created luminosity on his skin so that when he came down from the mountain, his face was shining. This was both awe-inspiring and unsettling for the people of Israel, and Moses had to cover his face with a veil. The veil, of course, also served another purpose. Since Moses's face simply reflected glory that was not his own, but God's, that brilliance or luminosity faded with time. The veil protected the people of Israel from discouragement, and from seeing the brightness on Moses's face fade.

In our reading from St Luke's gospel, our Lord takes Peter, John and James with him up Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi to pray; and while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white ('like a flash of lightning', according to some translations). On that mountain, we are told that the three disciples witnessed Christ's glory, alongside that of Moses and Elijah (9. 32). We can only wonder: when the appearance our Lord's face changed,² did it somehow show the true image of the Son, who is just like (or to put it in a familiar way, the 'spitting image' of) his Father? Perhaps this is what shone through at the Transfiguration; perhaps this is what the disciples saw that day and missed seeing on other days.

And then in our epistle reading, St Paul tells the Corinthian Church that all Christians are like Moses, but also not like him. We are like him in that 'we see the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror' (that is, not fully, because we will only see the glory of God face to face after our death); and we are unlike Moses in that our glory is not fading. To the contrary, it is increasing, as we are transformed into God's image from one degree of glory to another, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Now I would like to be very practical. How is it that you and I see the glory of God today, as though reflected in a mirror?

² In the Greek text, the 'eidos' of the Son's face changed; the image of his face was altered.

Well, it happens firstly when we keep our eyes on Jesus. All of us know what it is to stand in front of a mirror, and to see the reflection of ourselves in that mirror. In order to *reflect* something, we must stand *in front* of something. The crucial message of Paul to the Corinthian Church (and to us) is that as we figuratively stand in front of Christ – who is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being³ – and as we *keep our eyes on him*, we will reflect his glory and be transformed. This transformation occurs gradually over time, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit in us. As we keep our eyes fixed on our Lord, the Holy Spirit works to change our inner drives, our desires and our longings.

But if we are honest with ourselves, all of us know that we need prompting to think about God and to keep our eyes fixed on him. We forget him so easily, don’t we?

This coming Wednesday, many of us will walk around with a smudge of ash on our foreheads, reminding us of God, and of our need to turn to him afresh and to love him. But Ash Wednesday only marks the beginning of Lent; and we would do well to think of ways that will help us to remember God as we go through this season.

I know of one mother who was keen to help her children keep Lent and to grow in their faith. One year, the mother drew a woman with seven feet, and then cut her out of cardboard. This cardboard woman had a head, a torso, arms, and then down from her waist came a huge skirt, at the bottom of which were seven L-shaped feet. The woman with seven feet appeared every year at the beginning of Lent, and each week the mother’s children would tear off one of the feet and say a prayer.

You might invent your own Lent customs (and they don’t have to involve cardboard women with seven feet!). You might, for example, tape a post-it note on the corner of your bathroom mirror with the words, ‘Love God today’. You might have a

³ Cf. Jn 1. 14 ; 2 Cor 4. 4b ; Col 1. 19

special Lenten calendar. You might decide to use the leaflets you have been given today and to read and reflect on the gospel passages that are given for each day in Lent. You might, on Fridays in Lent, eat more sparingly in remembrance of the fact that it was on Friday that Jesus died.

Or you might place a little card on your door to remind you, when you go out, to think of the first person you meet, whoever he or she is, as a friend of God; and to pray for that person when you see him or her. You might put a small picture of Christ on your kitchen table, or a crucifix on the wall. You might light a candle before an icon in your home, maybe once a day; or once a week; or just whenever you think of it.

These ideas are not rocket science, but they can be very effective. In Lent, and in every season, it is God whom we want to love; and we want to have him on our mind as often as we can, every day of our life.

For most of us, the problem is not that we are really bad people, but that we are forgetful. God has already changed our hearts, and he is continuing to change them through the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has already claimed every one of us for his own. It is possible, of course, for us to be really bad people; we might reject God and run off and ruin everything. But our ordinary, everyday problem is forgetfulness. We forget who we are. We forget what God has done for us. We forget, and thus we fail to love God and to keep our eyes fixed on him.

How can we keep our eyes on God? By remembering him, hour by hour, day by day. And thus, in a splendid multitude of ways, we will be changed—as we already are being changed—from glory to glory, until we see him face to face.

Amen.