

2nd Sunday of Lent (A)  
(Genesis 12:1-4 / Matthew 17:1-9)  
08.03.2020

*The transfigurations God sends our way*

Our forty days of Lent are a reminder of the forty years that the Israelites spent in the desert. When we look at a map of the route they followed, we notice that they did not take the shortest route. They went south, then north, then west, then south again and then north east... quite an advertisement for any brand of satnav!

Their wanderings, their wrong turns and their stops in the desert are not without saying something to us about our lives. Who among us is able to look back and see a straight line from his or her birth until the present day? Who could say that his or her life has been an uneventful, undisturbed, unchallenged long flow of days?

Like small boats, our lives have been subjected to too many contrary winds to have remained unshaken: fears, doubts, crisis, the experience of sickness and death, all that has happened and is happening around us, in the world and in other people cannot but unsettle us and remind us constantly that we are not in control of everything, we are not really at the helm of our lives. Ours could be the prayer attributed to a Breton fisherman: "Dear God, be good to me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small."

Today in our Gospel reading, we see the disciples going up and down a high mountain: experiencing the tiredness of such an expedition, being overwhelmed by fear and leaving the place puzzled, not having grasped the full meaning of what they witnessed.

The whole experience must have been quite traumatic for Peter, James and John.

Yet in the very midst of the feelings of tiredness, fear and puzzlement, there is the vision of Jesus transfigured and talking with Moses and Elijah. The vision stands as a humble and strong sign that the darkness, all the messy feelings, all the shadows in our lives are not the whole of their reality. The vision was given to the disciples so that they might understand – at the right time – that the darkness and the shadows surrounding them were limited and temporary.

It must be clear that, in the story, the disciples are not informed that they have to journey in the dark and that one day, in a far distant future, they will see the light. The Transfiguration story is about the fact that in the here and now God's light can transfigure all things and – in so doing – can help us to journey in hope and in trust while we struggle and wrestle with life's daily challenges.

In all our lives, just as in the episode of the Transfiguration, there are times when we are tired, when we do not understand what is happening, when we are afraid and bewildered but there are also discreet, humble and real transfigurations which occur; we see rays of light which dispel the darkness, indicate the way forward and encourage us to move on.

So the question that we should ask ourselves today is this: do we have eyes that see the transfigurations God sends our way?

The disciples going up the high mountain could serve as an image for us of all those times when we have to climb the mountain of suffering and pain, not really knowing what is coming next. We must ask: do we keep our eyes open, willing to look in the right place, moved by the desire to see beyond what claims our whole attention?

Our answer to these questions is crucial for, in a very dramatic way, it conditions our ability to go down from the mountain back to the reality of our daily human lives.

In the opening prayer of our celebration, we asked that we may have our “spiritual sight made pure”. In one of his sermons for the Nativity, St Leo uses the same Latin expression (*spirituali intuitu*) when he prays that we may develop a spiritual insight, a deeper ability to see, to look at all that the Lord accomplishes around us (cf. *Serm.* 26:1).

This spiritual insight is not a way to deny the reality of what we feel or experience, particularly what is tough or painful. We are not supposed to become blind to what is difficult for us in the world or in our own lives.

But we are invited to see as God sees, to look at all people and all things as God looks at them. This is what a genuine Christian spiritual insight is about.

The light of the Transfiguration dispels the darkness but it does not necessarily change the concrete situation in which we find ourselves and does not automatically remove the cause of the darkness we experience. God’s light is meant to help us to stand up rather than remain crushed down, it helps us to move on rather than become stuck and paralysed by fears, it helps us to see that we are not alone and without hope.

While pain and suffering will always bring us to the desolate inner land of loneliness and bitterness and narrow our field of vision to the point where we become quasi-blind, the light of Christ reconnects us with others and points us to new horizons.

This light is not inaccessible to us, surely, it is not too far away, it is not in heaven, that we should say, “Who will go up to heaven and get it for us?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that we should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us?” No, God’s light is very near to us; it is in our hearts (cf. Dt 30:11-14). Since our baptism we have become the “light of the world” (Mt 5:14).

During this Lenten season, with St Paul, we should pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened (cf. Eph 1:18), purified from all the specks – and the beams – which prevent us from really seeing what is at stake in and around us.

May all the observances we have imposed upon ourselves during Lent be an opportunity for all of us to become more aware of the loving kindness of our God, active and present in us and around us in so many discreet and yet powerful ways. May God’s light within us shine forth for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.