

2nd Sunday of Lent (B)  
(Genesis 22:1-2.9-13.15-18 / Mark 9:2-10)  
28.02.2021  
*Alone*

After a year with Covid-19, with many ongoing restrictions and having undergone a few lockdowns, the word *alone* has taken on a deeper meaning and gained a greater intensity in our lives. Self-isolation, shielding and quarantine periods have become synonyms of *being alone*: alone at home, alone in a hospital or alone in a nursing home.

The episode of the Transfiguration begins and ends with the word *alone*: at the beginning of the text we read how Jesus takes his disciples to a high mountain “where they could be alone by themselves” and at the end, we are told that the disciples “saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.”

While for many being alone generates loneliness, for Jesus and for the disciples in our Gospel reading, the physical state of being alone did not induce an emotional state of abandonment and rejection.

In our story we see that Jesus wanted the disciples to be alone so that they might be present and attentive to his Transfiguration and, at the end, Jesus was alone so that he could be fully present to the disciples. The point here is that being alone was a transitional state on the way towards greater communion.

In opposition to being scattered, dispersed, and inattentive, being alone is a means of becoming focused, centred and unified. It is a bit like the artist or the athlete who needs a time of silence and concentration before making an intense effort.

For Jesus, to be alone with the disciples or with Elijah and Moses was a step that allowed him to be intentionally present to these important encounters.

On the Mount of the Transfiguration, Jesus went through a very intense and personal experience.

In his dialogue with Elijah and Moses, he reflected on his death in Jerusalem (cf. Lk 9:31), and the whole meeting was an occasion for him to reveal his true identity to his disciples. The importance of this event cannot be underestimated. Its intimate nature required focus and attention.

In fact whenever we think of Jesus’ birth or of his Resurrection, we find the same need for silence and being alone. To be alone is necessary, it is a kind of requirement for depth and truth in key events.

The same dynamic is at work in our lives. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke believed that “in the deepest and most important things, we are unutterably alone.” Deep experiences of self-discovery or of enlightenment about the meaning of life require of us to be alone and to pause, not to be lonely but free from the noise which may surround us and distract us so much of the time.

The story of the Transfiguration speaks to us about depth, focus and truth and it challenges everything in our lives that is dominated by distraction and superficiality.

Jesus embraces short times of being alone not as an end in themselves or because he is moved by a proud sense of self-reliance but because he wants to go deeper in his identity and mission. In his divinity and in his humanity, Jesus is communion, communion in the Trinity and communion with us, so for him to be alone was about being at the service of his mission of communion.

At a time when for many of our contemporaries, the word alone implies loneliness, it is urgent for us to rediscover the value of being alone as a means to being in communion. Maybe the challenge of this Lenten season in a time of pandemic is to make aloneness rhyme with real connectedness.

Why not to begin with ourselves and use the times when we are alone as an opportunity for us to dive deeper into our hearts? Not in order to become self-absorbed but in order to meet our heavenly Father who is waiting for us there – deep within us.

The goal is to take the time required to visit the temple of our hearts and to own what is in them: our feelings, our past and our present, in brief to own our lives, and to own them in such a way that we may be at home in our own skin and this, ultimately, so that others may feel at home around us.

Then we must reflect on the quality of our relationships with those we meet... The present restrictions should make us long for real relationships, not only for parties and chit-chat. Loneliness cannot be defeated by superficial talking and meeting, on the contrary superficiality feeds loneliness. To be alone should be a school in which we learn greater attentiveness to others, it should be an opportunity for us to look at others with care and respect, to listen to them with patience.

All this is not easy. Too often we prefer to remain at the surface. We avoid being alone by filling our lives with sounds and images, by multiplying inconsequential encounters, by satisfying ourselves with virtual friends and followers.

I do not imply that all our meetings should have the intensity and the depth to them as that which occurred on the Mount of the Transfiguration. That would be quite exhausting! Yet if there is a lesson we must draw from Covid-19 is, as Pope Francis reminds us: “From faith in God who is Trinity, it follows that in order to be myself I need others. I am truly human, truly personal, only if I relate to others.” (Message, 24.01.2019)

For all of us who long to be truly human, we need to imitate Jesus and to courageously set aside some times when we are alone so that we may relate to others in truth.

Let us not be afraid! The times when we are alone can become springboards to help us reach a higher level of truth about who we are; times when we are alone can be times of training so that our hearts, stretched to greater capacity, may welcome God in the friend or the stranger who visits us.

The Transfiguration of Christ should encourage us. In our lives and in the life of the world, there is more than what we see at the first glance: there is meaning and light.