

2nd Sunday of Lent (C)
(Genesis 15:5-12.17-18 / Luke 9:28-36)
13.03.2022
Chosen & Beloved

The episode of the Transfiguration is present in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. There are very few differences between the presentation made by the three evangelists. One difference is that in Matthew (17:5) and Mark (9:7), the voice from heaven designates Jesus as “the Beloved” while in Luke, the version we heard today, the voice designates him as “the Chosen.”

“Chosen” and “beloved”, the two notions are by no means dissimilar. The passage from Isaiah from whom Luke’s designation draws incorporates the two words: “Look, my servant I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul delights” (42:1).

Moses’ words in the book of Deuteronomy makes a clear link between the two concepts: “It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you” (7:7-8).

Jesus is the Chosen One because he is the Beloved.

In our Churches, we reflect a lot on Christ the King, Christ the Good Shepherd, Christ the Light of the world... beautiful titles indeed but rarely do we meditate upon the Father’s own words: Christ the Chosen one, the Beloved. I do not know of any parish or religious congregation placed under the patronage of Christ the Chosen One, the Beloved.

Yet on the day of our baptism, our heavenly Father said to you and me in a very personal way: “You are my chosen one, my beloved.” At three key moments in Jesus’ life, his Baptism, his Transfiguration and his Passion, the Gospels feel the need to remind us that everything begins with love, God’s love which makes him choose us, elect us for ever.

God’s choice of us is pure grace. It is the greatest manifestation of his love. There is no person so humble, or so vicious, no person, to whom God does not entrust himself in love. The simple fact of being is enough for God to love us, to choose us as his beloved.

How true it is that God’s ways are not our ways. Let us be honest, while God’s love is unconditional, given without any prerequisite, our love is often conditional. In our relationship with God and with others, we tend to buy or to earn love, we make our love dependant upon our interests, on whether or not others belong to our tribe or our church, whether or not they adhere to our ideology, whether or not they agree with us or comply with our expectations.

We are chosen by God not because we are better than others, not because we deserve it but because he loves us.

God does not attach any conditions to his love and to our election, either achievements or conformity.

Challenges, difficulties, failures, wounds, disappointments and other people may try to question the truth and the constancy of God’s election and love for us; sometimes we may be so caught up in an addiction, or in a destructive spiral of guilt or self-harm that we think that God cannot but reject and condemn us, yet we have to remember that the Lord our God is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations (cf. Dt 7:9). He chose us because he loves us and his love is stronger than death, more powerful than any enemy within or without.

The Dean of the Lutheran cathedral of Nidaros in Norway tells the story that one day, as a group of children were visiting the cathedral, he asked them: "Who are the saints?", a little boy raised his hand and answered: "A person through whom the light shines...". He had seen the sun shining through the stained glass window in the cathedral.

The question we should ask ourselves is: what is shining through us? Is it love or hatred, is it the loving embrace of being chosen, elected by God or is it the hard attitude of rejection and condemnation?

Our Lenten journey is about returning to the place where we belong, where we are welcome and respected, where we know that we are chosen and loved so that we may radiate the light of love.

At the Transfiguration, Jesus' face was changed and his vestments became brilliant by the power of love. In the Transfiguration, Jesus reveals his deep identity as the Chosen One, the Beloved. On Mount Tabor, Jesus was transfigured by the power of love. In our lives also, all things can be transfigured by the same power of love.

And so for us Lent is not a time when we put ourselves down. If we deny ourselves something it is in order to allow our true identity to reveal itself in all its beauty. Lent is the opportunity for us to let go of stuff that prevents the stained glass window from allowing the light to shine through it. Lent is the time to remove the filters that dim the light, to remove the blinds and the curtains that darken our lives.

Unfortunately, in our hearts and minds, there are many sorts of filters and curtains... at the moment in the decision of Vladimir Putin to invade Ukraine and in the support of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the curtains of nationalism, of religious extremism, of blind violence, of abuse of power are threatening the Ukrainian people and the whole of Europe.

If Lent is the time of tough decision making, then we have to pray for our political leaders that they may discern wisely and act courageously against Vladimir Putin. What is at stake for our countries is to reveal what their true values are, whether or not we want the light of peace and justice to shine through us.

The message of the Transfiguration is a message of confirmation and encouragement: "You are my Chosen one, my Beloved." In order to strengthen his Russian identity and to boost his ego, Vladimir Putin is killing people. Thank God, we do not go as far as that, yet we all have to be careful to remember that it is not in putting others down that we feel better, stronger and more secure about ourselves.

In 1942, a year before being killed in Auschwitz, Etty Hillesum wrote: "Ultimately we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world." (J. 29.09.1942, p. 267)

Today, for you and me, here in Northern Ireland, the challenge is to find our peace by connecting with our deep identity, with who we truly are: chosen and beloved by God, made in the image and likeness of God who is communion and peace and who calls us to be men and women of communion and peace.