

Homily 2nd Sunday in Lent (12.3.17)

'Transfiguration' - radical change in our lives

The reaction of Peter to the Lord's Transfiguration, is one that we all have to some transforming, or 'transfiguring' event. He was so excited that he wanted to build three tents or shrines, or in another translation, three booths to remember and enshrine the experience. And we all do that don't we? We want to remember things because we all have transfiguring experiences in real life. For some people it's the birth of a child absolute transfiguration / transformation / awe filled experience. We take lots of photos, they bring the event back to mind, but it's obviously never quite the same as the original experience.

Our Mass can be a transfiguring experience. The Mass is a liturgical representation of the Last Supper. We recall the things Jesus said and did, and we can enter into those experiences by faith, and truly receive Jesus in Holy Communion. Our prayerful attendance at Mass, can and should transfigure us a little, and help us enter into the Divine. Like the Apostles, people do climb mountains, and describe it as an overwhelming and transformative experience, but here's the interesting bit, transformation for us doesn't come about without a little effort on our part. Jesus couldn't rise to the glory of Heaven without the pain of the Cross.

We can think of people throughout history right up to the present day who have been transfigured - changed for the better, through their experience of suffering. You've only to think of someone like Nelson Mandela, who was transfigured through his struggle with apartheid, or Mahatma Gandhi, or some of the present day Christians in the Middle East who have been through such sufferings yet, over time are made spiritually stronger for that time of trial. Mother Teresa says she remembers being physically attacked by evil, and events in her life which tried to thwart her care for the poor, yet she emerged finally triumphant.

What we don't like to know, and I don't like to know, is that we too have to go through the cross, ultimately to be transfigured. If we go back to the mountain climber - it takes a lot of grit and pain and struggle to get to the top. The birth of a child is incredibly painful, but that is replaced, the pain subsides in the overwhelming joy of a new baby. Every transforming / transfiguring experience – for some reason – it's part of the mystery - has to involve struggle and pain, and somehow we are transformed in the process. I suppose why we get this transfiguration gospel in lent, is to remind us that we can't bypass from one to the other. People try drink and drugs to blot out pain - but that brings its own problems and ultimate disaster.

And so Lent reminds us in the challenge of fasting and abstinence, and trying to do something on the Fridays and Wednesdays of Lent, that the cost of allying ourselves with denial is potentially a transfiguring experience. It changes our psyche - as in climbing a mountain or the birth of a child, or whatever transforming experience you've had.

So the gospel today is an invitation to take Lent seriously, and ultimately to experience the transfiguring joys Easter.