

“Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart... and he was transfigured before them... (and) a cloud overshadowed them...”

✠ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

Today our perception of the Transfiguration of Christ might well be influenced by the modern Night-Club experience which we know if not from being there - most certainly from film or TV! We can easily picture the pitch-black background brought to life with strobe-lighting and colour changes with light suddenly focused on the star who is being transfigured before our very eyes...

But of course what is recorded in this second Lenten Gospel from St Mark is more than colour and movement.

Like last Sunday's Gospel when the Spirit drove *Jesus out into the wilderness*. (Where)... *He was (for) forty days, (to be) tempted by Satan* we have placed before us today the reason he was able to withstand the temptations of the Devil - in that his status was (and is) Divine -

“This is my Son, the Beloved; Listen to him!”

Interestingly when we compare today's Gospel to the other Gospel accounts of the transfiguration we find -

1. Mark says nothing of the change of Jesus' *face*
2. But he emphasizes the whiteness of Jesus' garments
3. He places the name of Elijah *before* that of Moses.
4. He emphasizes Peter's bewilderment and lack of understanding
5. He states that the three disciples were also

bewildered - particularly about Jesus' allusion to the resurrection of the dead.

Interestingly, where Jesus often commanded the demons and those who were being healed - to keep silence - Here he tells three intimates - Peter, James and John - to keep silence! As the Gospel says "So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean..."

We now believe that this very questioning was **the** reason for Jesus' command to keep silence...

The commentators believe that Jesus did not want the disciples or his followers to see his healing powers and miracles as **logically culminating** in the transfiguration.

For, **against** this triumphalist Christology Jesus stood before them as "...the suffering Son of man."

Consequently he did not want the mystery of the transfiguration revealed until *after* the resurrection.

The problems of understanding on the part of the disciples are not unlike our problems in fully understanding **who Jesus is**.

The triumphalist hopes of the disciples were ready for the Epiphany Christology that culminates in the grandeur of the Mystery of the Transfiguration. But they were **not yet ready** for the suffering Son of man who attains his glory **only through the Passion**.

So the revelation of the Transfiguration **before** Christ's death and resurrection would be a **totally flawed Christology** involving **glory *without* the cross**.

Today we continue to struggle with who Jesus is - Some churches proclaim Christ the Healer and wonder-worker, others - Christ the social activist and reformer, others the Christ of the Mystery and the Sacraments, others the Christ

of Holy Order and Temple whilst others seek a **new** religion and a radical re-invention of Christ Jesus and his teaching.

It is all too easy to rest on the laurels of the glories of the Catholic Faith and the great tradition or the Church of the European Reformation or to emphasize any theological or liturgical enrichment thereof - be it the Latin Mass or the Book of Common Prayer or the gift of tongues! - **but if they do not hold before us the true cost of discipleship and the reality of the suffering Son of man, and if they do not bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit - they are of little worth!**

That is why the Crucified one upon the Rood or above the Holy Table should always be present in every church - for that image of the suffering Son of man **is central in our Lord's proclamation of himself and is truly the cost of discipleship.**

As St Paul says in today's Epistle "...we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."

And in following the suffering Son of man, we are then able to say with Paul... "... that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us"

At the transfiguration, the disciples experienced the mystery of the glory **yet to be revealed** - but Jesus knew that without their experiencing something of the suffering of the Son of man that they had **an incomplete understanding** of the Mystery of the Gospel.

For many today the suffering Son of man **is not a palatable** Gospel. Instead they will seek withdrawal from the world through Meditation and often in a place where they can escape to soak up luxury in a beautiful space and receive the pampering of massages, facials, foot treatments and body

scrubs. But men and women of faith know that none of these things will fill the aching void.

Like Abraham our father in faith we may also be tested but through this great story - we the people of faith also know and believe that the Lord will provide the Lamb of Sacrifice for us.

But something greater than a Lamb is here - for our Lamb is ***the* Lamb of God** that takes away the sins of the world.

So on this Second Sunday in Lent we are unsurprisingly reminded of the centrality of sacrifice and the cross -

Our father, Abraham made the journey of faith to the land of Moriah and there on a high mountain at God's request, did not hold back in building an altar to offer his only beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice to God.

And then at another time and another place on a high mountain there came a voice saying "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him." And he was transfigured as a sign that beyond sacrifice **there *is* redemption and new life.**

As the Apostle Paul said "... for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Sunday by Sunday we kneel at the Cross of Christ and we receive the fruits of his sacrifice for us.

Like Peter James and John, we have our moments of transfiguration when we see Jesus more clearly and our lives are changed. But we also come to know with the disciples that we must also walk the way of the suffering Son of man and that without that suffering the Gospel is incomplete and

that the great enduring Lenten slogan is indeed -
No Cross! No Crown!

So let us embrace our cross whatever form it may take that we might be **more** than a church offering healing and comfort or a church concerned **only** with social justice and human rights or on the other hand a church with nothing to say about any of these human needs. But may we embrace the needs of our world in such a way that we will be, above all a **transfigured** church and a church for **all** people and not only those with whom we feel comfortable and who seem to be like ourselves!

This is our great challenge and **like the Lord of Lent himself** we too will have to become **suffering** men and women and walk the way of the cross - for the church and this world have yet a long journey before we are so transfigured that we might truly be the sons and daughters of God.

✝ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.