

The Second Sunday of Lent.

Frozen with fear, lying with their faces cast downwards, Peter, James and John had never experienced anything like this before. Was it unreal? What was happening? This seemed a step too far and who on earth was this Jesus who had brought them to the mountain for this? In their terror they felt the hand they had come to know and that familiar voice saying to them 'Stand up, do not be afraid'.

They looked up and everything was back to normal, if that was possible. Standing alone in front of them was Jesus. No vision of Moses or Elijah, no voice from above and no sight of transfiguring light. 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.' Perhaps it would only make sense when Jesus had in fact died and was risen but this was a vital experience of coming to know who Jesus was. As they descended the mountain perhaps they were coming to terms with the truth that leaps out of every page of Matthew's Gospel that Jesus is Emmanuel, 'God with us'. This man who had called them to follow and trust him, he who was upsetting the authorities in a very disturbing way, somehow combined the humanity which they knew so well and in which they recognised him with his life as God. Things would not be the same again because this experience on the mountain was one that would stay with them for ever. That in their relationship with Jesus they enjoyed a relationship with God as well. Soon this experience would carry them through the Easter experience of death and resurrection and then they would recognise his transfigured and divine presence in the resurrection gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today's celebration and word, coming as it does during Lent, invites us to consider that we too can experience the touch of Jesus and his voice saying 'Stand up, do not be afraid'.

Abraham, in the reading to which we have just listened, obeys God's calls and does the unimaginable. He leaves his tribal home and territory. It was unimaginable because he was leaving behind everything that gave his life and that of his family security and meaning. But he did it and he did it in the sure hope that God who made the request would remain with him.

Like Abraham, everyday brings the challenge of leaving the familiar behind and moving into the unknown. Everyday will bring that feeling of fear, albeit it with varying intensity, that the unknown which we know we will have to encounter may be unbearable and change our lives in a way that could be not to our liking. It could be a relationship; a health or employment issue; a family problem; a financial one or just the sense and feeling that life at the moment is too much and too fast.

Whatever the challenge and discomfort, however the fear might manifest itself, Jesus touches us and says '**Stand up, do not be afraid.**' As it was for Peter, James and John and for Abraham, so it is for us.

Jesus says to us in this same Gospel of Matthew, 'Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest'. How do we make that a reality for ourselves and those we love? How can we enter that religious experience which brings the most profound peace and freedom?

As always St. Paul has the answer, we are to 'rely on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy.' To experience that peace, to allow him to lift the burden, to recognise his presence and action we must know that his saving power is a gift and we must give thanks for it in every circumstance and particularly in our weekly celebration of Mass. That recognition of the gift which is evident in our faith

will open us to a deepening of our ability to feel his touch and to hear his voice to which the Father invites us to listen.

The face of Christ is revealed to us when we come with trust and confidence to him with the burdens and afflictions that life inevitably brings. It is this trust and reliance that changes our sight and allows that wider vision which recognises Jesus in prayer.

The face of Christ is revealed to us when we come with compassion, respect and gentleness into every relationship that is given to us. True some relationships and some people will cast a shadow in our lives of envy, or impatience, or lack of forgiveness or some unforgotten hurt or embarrassment. It is these very feelings that will be transfigured if we can but allow love to be the priority and trust that the Lord will lead us into a new way of seeing and feeling.

Matthew tells us that Peter was interrupted by the Father's voice who cut right across him. As he was talking about wanting to build three tents, he was silenced as he heard 'This is my Son, the beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him'. We cannot be quite sure about Peter's intentions, why did he want to build three tents? Could it be to contain and keep the experience and stop it going away? To keep Moses, Elijah and Jesus in a kind of timeless museum of fascinating experiences! Well, if that was it he was wrong to do it and was not permitted to. He was to follow Jesus into the uncertainty and pain of Jerusalem.

That seems to be the final point. To see the face of Christ in our present lives; to feel his touch and listen to his voice lifting our burdens, we must not be building tents to accumulate things of which we should be letting go. Yes, the temptation, which fools us into thinking it is a necessity, is to think that we need to cling to experiences, and people, and power, and pleasure, and possessions to secure our lives and give us security and comfort. No, the Father's voice cuts across such an approach and proclaims the amazing freedom that in following Christ there is no need to take anything for the journey, just listen to him. And, as Jesus says, it is the ones who will lose their lives who find them.