

Trinity 9. Proper 14, 9 August 2009
S Lawrence the Martyr (transferred)

- Ephesians 4: 25-5:2.
- Psalm 34: 1-8. O taste and see ...
- Gospel: John 6: 35, 41-51.
- Gospel for S Lawrence: Matthew 6: 19-24.

A fantasia on faces, images.

Last Thursday was the Feast of the Transfiguration. Tomorrow is the Feast of S Lawrence, the Barlow Carnival connexion.

Transfiguration. Mountain top, clouds, glory. Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets brought into the present with Jesus and the disciples, the interconnectedness of time, the real sense that memories bring the past into the present. Zikkaron. Sacraments. Old people. Time annihilated. Timelessness.

Then we have Jesus with his face shining.

Faces that we present to the world. Is our face a shining face, a radiant face, an authentic face? A face that reflects what is going on inside? Is it a face that is a means of communication with the outside world. Facial muscles are called *mimetic* muscles because they *mimic* our emotions.

Or is our a face a pretence, covered by a mask

—*persona*? Is it a face that hides the real self, a barrier between ourselves and others? Face not as a means of communication, but face as barrier.

A face that is uncovered lets the real me shine out to the world: *let your light so shine ...* A face that is uncovered allows me to see more clearly. An uncovered face that allows me to see the truth, and allows others to see the true me. The radiant face of someone who is utterly at peace with themselves. A face that speaks the truth.

Epistle: speak the truth. Not evasions, not pretending that all is well when it is not. When we do this there are consequences that we don't want. Not covering our faces. Bankers, Politicians. Advertising industry. Liars, Deceit, Cheating. Charm. Saving face.

Speaking the truth is expensive: it can cost one dear in terms of consequences. It can cost friendships. But if it does, maybe they were not worth having. Speaking the truth can cost me my life: Romero, martyrs of the Nazis, the Communists. Martin Luther King.

St Lawrence: spoke the truth and took the consequences. Speaking the truth, and being one's true self, exposing one's innermost thoughts and fears is exhausting. It can break one. In Lawrence's brokenness, his martyrdom, he is remembered.

Two weeks ago we read St John's feeding of the five thousand, and today we have Jesus telling his followers that he is the bread of life. This is effectively John's account of the beginning of the Eucharist. In the brokenness of the bread, Jesus is remembered. Jesus breaking the bread to expose its substance. Jesus allowing himself to be exposed, broken, crucified.

In the mass we break open the word. In the mass we break open the bread. In the mass we break open the body. In my life as a parish priest I hear of other people's brokenness. If my response is to be authentic, I am wrung out, broken, at a loss to know what to do. Powerless to deal with lonely people who have lost the love of their lives, their companions, their soul friends. Powerless to deal with grief, anger, shame and guilt.

Jesus teaches us to share ourselves with the world, to expose ourselves to the world, not holding back. Open to being broken.

When we take HC we have what amounts to a personal interview with the Lord. What does the Lord see? Do we put on a mask of pretence, covering ourselves up with spiritual cosmetics, pretending that all is well? Trying to justify to ourselves the baser aspects of our nature? How can we ever be healed unless we acknowledge we are ill?

I am so troubled by past mistakes, blindnesses, feeblenesses etc. Incapacitated by shame at my foolishness. I sometimes feel that it's at these moments when I am confronted by the truth of my past self-deceptions that I am ushered into the divine presence.

This is purgatory, here and now; the place where I have my mask (persona) removed. And the final dreadful, awful moment comes when I see myself in a mirror exactly as the divine has seen me all along and I can not bear the sight. When I see that the reasons I did things that I thought were for the good of others were actually selfishness dressed up as altruism. In that moment I am in the fire, in the presence of God. Like Newman's Gerontius I can not bear the sight and call out:

*Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep, Told out for me.*

When we see ourselves as God sees us, we judge ourselves. It is shocking. It is exhausting.

But there is hope.

A man that looks on glass on it may stay his eye, or if he pleaseth through it pass and then the heavens espy.

I am forged by the fire into gold. The Elixir.

This is the famous stone that turneth all to gold: For that which God doth touch and own cannot for lesse be told.

And then I see the reflection of God. The glass is not see-through glass, but a mirror in which I see myself as God sees me. Then I become the image of God, cleansed by the fire.

Name of the Rose. Mirror. Imago Dei. Secretum. Holy of holies.

As we receive Christ's body in our hands we are putting ourselves in his hands to be broken by him, to be snapped out of what we think we are, where we think we belong, who we want to call ourselves. One day I will tell you how three years of ordained ministry have changed me. Susan will tell you how after I have opened my heart to you in Sunday sermons—and I do—I am drained and exhausted and fit for nothing on a Monday.

Laurence the martyr. In some way we are all called to be martyrs. Let our martyrdom be speaking the truth in spiritual nakedness before the Lord. Remember the Transfiguration. Remember Lawrence. Remember the broken body.

God bless this mess.