

## Quinquagesima 2013 Sunday next before Lent, Transfiguration

Exodus 34: 29-35  
Psalm 99  
2 Corinthians 3:12 to 4:2  
Luke 9: 28-36

Easter is early this year. The last one in March was in 2008, and the next will be 2016. I like an early Easter. It gives a sense of progress and movement to the year, and it means that I can enjoy the long procession of Sundays after Trinity before girding up my loins for another season of Harvests, Advent and Christmas.

Today's readings have a sense of movement. Over the last few weeks we've had a series of manifestations of the Divine: to shepherds, to magi, to Jews, to non Jews. First, Jesus was a baby, then at the Baptism an adults, then last week a baby again, and today he's an adult again? *What's occurring?* We have the same gospel reading on the feast of the Transfiguration in August. Why today as well, on the Sunday when we go round the corner from Christmas and Epiphany to face Lent and Easter?

Well, that's why – *we go round the corner from Christmas and Epiphany to face Lent and Easter.* It's about movement and sense of purpose. It's the point that moves us from what Jesus has been and is, to what he will become. The becoming. The metamorphosis. The time, if you like, when he enters the chrysalis in order to burst out at resurrection/ascension.

- *Jesus looking backwards*, to Moses and Elijah. 'Do you want to stay there in houses that I build for the three of you?' asks Peter. 'No, we've work to get on with. No living in the past for me.'
  - *Jesus in the present* with the voice of God booming out his approval of Jesus. He is declared the anointed one who has come in fulfilment of all that the Israelites longed for, to take the past on to greater glories.
  - *Jesus in the future* as he sets his face to go to Jerusalem – to the crucifixion.
- 'Sets his face to go' – the crucial phrase turning us from past to future. Face, image, the principal organ of communication. In a few pages time we have the face of agony, Jesus on a different hill, with different companions. A different kind of glory. From glory to glory.

Moses' face shining, after being in the presence of God, shining like a storage heater that continues to glow after being removed from the source of energy. But Moses' face was veiled from the Israelites. Writing this sermon in the last couple of days I had a revelation. A veil was lifted from my eyes. I was blind and came to see this in a new way. The veil is between Moses and Israelites. but it's not put there by Moses, or by the Lord. It's put there, unknowingly by the Israelites, who because of their pride, hardheartedness and moaning refuse to see the plain truth.

Is this why our view of the Divine is so difficult to glimpse? Is it because of the veils or barriers we erect? Barriers of pride? Barriers of pretending we're better than we are, or stronger than we are, or less vulnerable than we are? Barriers that make us seem we have no problems, no worries? Barriers that makes us hard-hearted as the Israelites were hard hearted (Venite: harden not your hearts ...)? The barriers that dull the glow of the shining divine face?

The gospel says 'Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory'. I think that it's when I'm tired and at the end of my tether and my defences are down that I am at my most open. *Blessed are the poor in spirit* – those who lack spiritedness. When you've lost all you have, you've nothing else to lose, and you can stop pretending. When we remove the veil of self, of me me me, we glimpse the divine.

Which takes me to the epistle. 'And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another'. We look into a mirror, and what do we see? Let me quote the great preacher Charles Spurgeon:

*Our own judgment of our own character usually errs on the side of partiality to ourselves. Nor is the evil so readily cured as some suppose, for the gift of seeing ourselves, 'as others see us,' is not so corrective as might be supposed. Some persist in seeing us through the coloured spectacles of prejudice and ill-will. And this injustice is apt to create in us a further partiality to ourselves. If other men make mistakes about us who can see us, they probably do not make such great blunders about us as we do about ourselves, since we cannot see our own faces! The truth is that we are very fond of ourselves and have our own characters in high esteem—therefore we are unfair judges on points of difficulty about ourselves.*

We think the world revolves around us. Me me me. We do damage in small and subtle ways until perhaps we realize that the cumulative effect has been catastrophic and that we have destroyed a life—our own—and maybe someone else's as well, and that we are left with nothing of value to hand back to the Lord when we pass through the glass, when we look into the mirror and glimpse ourselves—not as others see us, and

certainly not as we see ourselves, but as the Lord sees us. Paul calls for transformation, and the word he uses for this is *metamorphoumetha*. Metamorphosis. Pupation, maturation, caterpillar to butterfly, 'ugly duckling' to swan. A *becoming* as William Blake says. The change that comes as we look on the mirror and see ourselves not as others see us but as the Lord sees us. We need help to *become* what the Lord wants us to be. Rabbi Zusya said, 'When I come to die, God will not ask me why I was not Moses, he will ask me why I was not Zusya.' Becoming the very best, as individuals, that the Lord made us to be. This is what we are to seek as Christian disciples. And we need to help others to be the best that they can be.

For this we need humility, we need perseverance and we need a sense of constant reliance upon *the other*—that is, to accept that we are not in control. We need to let go of the pretences that veil our faces so we cannot see clearly. Maybe this is what Lent can be about: not giving up things like chocolates, but giving up those things that veil our view of the world. Giving up, perhaps, the idea that nobody else's opinion matters as much as our own.

'A man that looks on glass, on it may stay his eye, or if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heavens espy.' If he pleaseth – the road is open to all. Maybe all we have to do is to stop resisting.