

Today is the last Sunday before the beginning of Lent, which starts on Wednesday. It's no accident that the Gospel reading chosen for today is this story of the transfiguration. It's a rather strange, even an enigmatic story that comes right in the middle of the Gospel. It comes after ... Peter has confessed Jesus as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi. That's the great turning point right in the middle of the Gospels. As soon as Jesus has been recognized as Messiah, straight away he starts to talk about his suffering and his death. He turns his face towards Jerusalem. We see that move in this passage. It's a story of transition. Notice that when Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah, the subject of the discussion is his departure, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.

This passage looks forwards to the events of Easter. This is the beginning of Jesus' long walk to the cross. The Gospel reading for today is paired with the Old Testament story we heard of Moses on Mount Sinai, as Luke's deliberately making a comparison between the two stories. There's a comparison between Jesus on the mountaintop and Moses going up to Mount Sinai to get the commandments. That's why the same word is used for departure, as in "Jesus' forthcoming to departure in Jerusalem." That word is the Old Testament word "exodus." Comes in both passages. Luke's emphasizing that just as Moses led his people, the people of Israel, on an exodus through the Red Sea into the Promised Land, so Jesus is going to lead his people on another Exodus through death to the Promised Land of eternal life on the other side.

There's so much more that could be said about this passage, in fact, all the rich passages set for today, but I'm just going to focus on Peter and the role that St. Peter plays in that Gospel reading. I might be biased. I have come after 18 years being vicar of a St. Peter's church in London, so I've always had a soft spot for him, but I think it's more than that. I think, as I read the gospels and look at Peter, and he's great, the mistakes he continually makes throughout the Gospels. I can see myself standing next to him making the same mistakes. The first thing that I note about Peter's role in the transfiguration story is that he nearly missed it. Peter and his companions we're told, "Will weigh down with sleep."

If they had succumbed to sleep, then presumably this story would just be one verse. "Peter went with James, John, and Jesus up the mountain to pray, and the next morning they came down and a great crowd greeted them." Thankfully, he didn't succumb to sleep. They stayed awake and witnessed this amazing encounter between Jesus and the prophets Moses and Elijah. A literal translation would say, "They were weighed down with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory." There's a message there about being fully awake to the glory of God. Gerard Manley Hopkins reminds us that the world is charged with the grandeur of God, but are we awake to it?

Many of us live comfortable lives and if we live too comfortably, then our comfort can desensitize us to God's glory in the world. If we don't rely on him, if we get to feel that we don't need him, we can fail to notice him. Our spirits are deadened. Some of you will know what I mean if I say that great trouble, sadness, or distress can wake us up spiritually. Lots of people will say, it was, it almost seems strange to say, but it's a time of great sadness that makes them think of God. If you're going through a time of deep sorrow, the chances are that you're fully awake to the spiritual world. Elgar, the great British composer once said of a young singer who was technically perfect, but without feeling and expression, "she will be great when something breaks her heart." I'm conscious when I'm speaking to a grieving family who've lost someone dear, perhaps before their time, that they're fully engaged with a conversation about life and life eternal.

The question of whether we'll be with God in all his glory after we die really matters to that family. They are fully awake to that discussion and the promise of God. Lent is a time to do all we can to wake up to the reality and glory of God in our lives.

The second thing about Peter is that he responded inappropriately to what he saw and I'm with him on this one. I know exactly how he feels. I'll tell you a story in which I share the same experience as Peter. It's not going to have its full impact here because it's a story about rugby. I know I'm talking about rugby on a day when most of you are thinking

about another sport but I'm going to tell it anyway. It's the best perk I've had as a priest.

My cousin who lives in New Zealand married a captain of the All Blacks rugby team. This is a big deal because not only are the All ... I'm not very keen on rugby but the All Blacks are the best team in the world and might be the best sports team of anywhere in the world. Anyway, I'll leave that to your discussion. I can feel the murmurings and that might come back to bite me over coffee, but anyway, I was flown out there to do this wedding. It was amazing. The service was on the beach. The paparazzi are just floating in boats off the sand. I stood up to leave the service, I could name everybody virtually in the congregation because they were all famous rugby players. I was overwhelmed. After the service, another former All Blacks captain came up to me and took me in a vice like grip and said something like, "Nice sermon padre." I just looked at him, and I had no idea, I don't know what came over me, but I just said, "I've seen you on the telly."

Straight away, I thought, what a stupid thing to say. Where can a conversation go from there? Nowhere. That's Peter's situation here. He sees Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, he sees Jesus, his face changed. He sees his clothes become dazzling white. Peter says, "Let's put up three tents," not knowing what he said. The conversation goes nowhere. Nobody picks up on it. While he's saying this, a cloud overshadows them. Peter's probably thinking, why did I say that? Why did he say it?

Perhaps it was understandable. He was doing something we're all prone to do which is to hang on to things that perhaps we shouldn't hang on to. He's saying, "It's good for us to be here Jesus, let's stay. We could build a dwelling, memorialize it. Make it permanent." As they say, life moves on. Life with God certainly moves on and all churches need to remember that.

Every church has a golden era. When things were going great, there was a sense of God's blessing on the place and the spirit moved. Of course, we can think like Peter, let's stay with this or if we did it that way again, we'd get the same results again. We'll be blessed again, but it doesn't work like that. Peter

wasn't meant to stay on the mountain top gazing at the glory of Jesus. That was for a moment. What Peter was granted was a glimpse of Jesus' glory and that was enough.

I hope I don't, maybe I've caused offense of whatever, I could cause offense by this story as well. I don't mean to, I am aware that you left the empire some time ago, but I am a very big fan of the royal family. A couple of years ago, myself, and Laura, and Miriam, we went to the wedding of Prince Charles and Kate Middleton. When I say we went, what I mean is, we packed a sleeping bag and a thermos flask and slept out on the mall, that great big road in front of Buckingham Palace and we stayed there the night before the wedding. Which meant that we were on the front row for the next day when William and Kate came past in the golden carriage. It was a magical moment as they went past. I can imagine there'll be some people here thinking, "That's crazy. Why sleep out on the road overnight to catch 30 seconds of them going past in a carriage?" It was worth it for us. It was enough for me to see them briefly. I didn't leave thinking, "Oh I wish we'd been invited to the reception," or "I wish we'd been in the service in the Abbey." Catching them as they went past that fantastic morning was enough.

I say that because we like Peter are often only granted a glimpse of God's glory. It can be enough. We all need those occasional glimpses of the glory of God. I had a friend, we were students together, and he came to faith, and he joined all the Christian union, he did everything right. Read the right books, went to all the right services, even went ... to be ordained. Though five years later I saw him, and he was an atheist. I said, "What happened?" He said, "I did all the right things. I read all the right books, went to all the right services, then one day I woke up and realized that I never felt that I had any experience of God." He had nothing to sustain him. After five years, his faith drained away. We all need those glimpses of God to sustain us in our walk of faith.

Let's seek those divine moments, those glimpses of glory. What Rudolf Otto calls, "The encounter with the numinous." I don't know about you, but for me, I feel that divine voice - a glimpse of glory. It comes to me when I'm reading scripture.

That's the nearest I have of a sense of an encounter with God. I start every day by reading the lectionary readings. I always make sure to include a Psalm. I don't feel that God speaks to me every day. More often than not, if I get a sense of God's speaking to me, it is through a Psalm. Sometime I can go through months thinking I might as well be reading a phone book but every now and again, there's that little prompting, that glimpse, that glimmer. I'll give you an example, and this is a story where God spoke me through the Psalms. As I said, I've come from London, it was very, very hard for us to leave London, but I knew it was time to go. We didn't know where to go, and one day Psalm 37 came up in the lectionary.

I read it and I just felt God prompted me to stay with it. I prayed every day with Psalm 37. After about 3 months, I was reading it and verse 4 struck out to me and stuck out. It's because in Psalm 37, verse 4, it says, "Trust in the Lord always, and he will give you the desires of your heart." That for me was the prompt to come to La Jolla. My wife Laura has always said to me, from before we got married, she always wanted to live by the sea. That was the desire of her heart. God was prompting me as I read that Psalm to say, "Go for that job you've seen in La Jolla because that will satisfy the desire of Laura's heart." Now you can say, "Well that's a small story. Anyone could ... That's just your own ... Who wouldn't want to live in La Jolla?" That for me was God's glimpse. God speaking. God passing by. That was an encounter for me, an encouragement to know that God was with me, and was involved in my life, and was encouraging me and showing me where to go.

This Lent, I invite all of us to be fully awake to the possibility of catching a glimpse of God's glory. I've always thought that giving up something for Lent was a touch negative. Why don't we take something up instead? Take on being fully awake to God's glory. We might make a point of reading the Bible. Reading a Psalm every day with an open heart saying, "God speak to me through this Psalm." We could attend a service that we don't normally attend and ask God to speak to us not just through his word but through the Eucharist. We might make a point of calling to mind those glimpses, those moments in our life that we've long forgotten. Just sitting down every day and calling

to mind times that we felt close to God and let that be an encouragement to us as we recall the times we glimpsed God's glory.

I think there's a special Lenten discipline I've never thought of before. It's a special Lenten discipline for those of us who live near here in La Jolla. We get an amazing proclamation of God's glory every day around 5:00 as we see that glorious sunset. We could have a Lenten discipline of making sure that we watch the sun go down and as we do, we give thanks to God for the wonder, and the splendor of his creation. Let's wake up to the glory of God that's all around us.

Finally, Peter and the others didn't stay on the mountain top. They came down and straight away, they were in the midst of the hurly burly of Jesus' every day ministry. They came down the mountain and someone shouted at them, "I beg you, look at my son." Jesus went up the mount to be transfigured, he came down to the valley to be a savior. Life for Jesus, and for Peter, indeed for all of us is not lived on the mountain top. It's worked out in the valley's but we live and work in the low lands. Energized and inspired by the knowledge that we can, we have glimpsed God's glory. This Lent, let's seek to live our lives with our eyes wide open to the reality. Not just the reality of God, but the possibility of catching a glimpse of his Glory. Amen.