

Sunday Message

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

THE WORD

Year B • 25 February 2024 • Psalter Week 2



PEAK EXPERIENCES

MARK 9:2-10

We all have moments that stand out as special and that we never want to end. I remember being on holiday on Cape Clear Island, off County Cork, sitting with my mother, father and sister on a bench overlooking the harbour.

It was a beautiful summer's day; the sea was calm, everything was so peaceful, and we felt so at one, that I experienced an incredible sense of joy. The four of us together with, for a little while, no concerns, no worries, no preoccupations. I didn't want it to end. It was a peak experience.

I remember being on a retreat many years ago, shortly before I took first vows. On the final day, the retreat master and I celebrated the sacrament of penance. I'd been to confession many times before, but this one was different. I had an overwhelming sense of God's closeness to me, of God loving me and forgiving me, an experience I never had before or since in its intensity. The tears flowed. It was a peak experience.

Peter, James and John have a peak experience in today's Gospel. Jesus has taken these three closest friends of his up a mountain to pray. Then something extraordinary happens. It's as if they are caught up in an ecstasy, and they see Jesus in his heavenly glory with Moses and Elijah, two of the great Old Testament figures. They see Jesus transfigured, transformed, radiant. They are so overcome, so full of joy, they do not want it to end. It is, literally, a peak experience.

Every year we read the transfiguration story on the Second Sunday of Lent. It reminds us of two truths.

First, that we all have, or are offered, peak experiences from time to time – special experiences of love and wonder, exhilaration and awe. Experiences that move or delight us. Maybe it's the birth of a longed-for child, and we gaze in wonderment at the living, breathing manifestation of our love. Maybe it's a moment of intimacy, of deep connection, with a loved one. Maybe it's an experience of being accepted, of being seen, for who you really are. Maybe it's an explosion of joy at a cherished ambition finally fulfilled. Such magic moments are rare and, therefore, precious. Treasure them when they occur.

For Christians, the sacraments offer such moments. Each is a grace-filled encounter with Christ, an exchange with the divine that uplifts, renews, sustains us. Spiritual peak moments that nourish and transform us. They give us a glimpse of the divine that we should treasure also.

Second, the transfiguration story is a reminder and a promise offered to the disciples and to us. The event takes place immediately after Jesus' prediction of his death, and in the midst of the growing hostility of the authorities towards him. It was a troubling time for the disciples. The experience of the transfiguration is to give them a boost. It is to reassure them as to who Jesus really is, and offer them a glimpse of what their destiny will be if they remain faithful to him. Jesus knew there would be difficult days ahead when the disciples' faith would be tested. The memory of the transfiguration would help to sustain them.

That's the promise made to us, too. We will have our peak experiences but also our trough experiences. We will have our times of delight but also our times of sadness. We will have our joys but our sorrows too. The transfiguration story is told on this Sunday to assure us and give us a lift. It tells us that even when we feel God's absence, even when we contemplate the scandals in the Church, even when financial or health or family problems threaten to submerge us, even when our faith wobbles, we can be certain that God is with us, that God's tent is pitched right over us. The transfiguration story tells us that if we listen to Jesus and follow him, if we hold fast to him through thick and thin, then the apostles' peak experience on the mountain that day will be our permanent experience in the glory of paradise. It's a foretaste of our heavenly destiny. ■

REFLECT

Peter, James and John were so transfixed by their mountaintop experience, they wanted it to last forever. It didn't, it couldn't, not this side of the grave. They had to come back down to earth once more. But so incredible was the moment that they never forgot it. The lesson for us is to always live in the moment, to live every moment fully. Despite everything, life is wonderful. Embrace it. Attune yourself to the manifest signs of God's presence all around. With eyes fixed firmly on the mountaintop, live each moment in a way that gives glory to God. ■

DO

Think about your Lenten commitments. How well are you sticking to them?

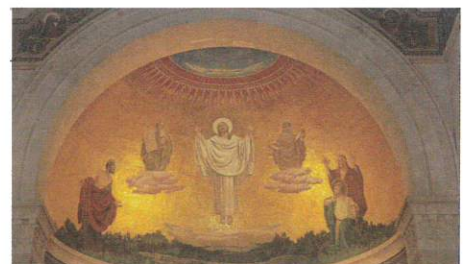
PRAY

Ask the Lord to strengthen you on your journey of faith, as the transfiguration moment strengthened the disciples for the challenges and difficulties that lay ahead of them.



LEARN

The transfiguration of Jesus offers us a glimpse of our destiny.



SAY

"Lord, help me always to listen to you. Help me always to appreciate your presence."

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**Of you my heart has spoken: Seek his face.
It is your face, O Lord, that I seek;
hide not your face from me.**

COLLECT

O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

A reading from the book of Genesis.
God put Abraham to the test. 'Abraham, Abraham' he called. 'Here I am' he replied. 'Take your son,' God said 'your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you.'

When they arrived at the place God had pointed out to him, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood. Then he stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven. 'Abraham, Abraham' he said. 'I am here' he replied. 'Do not raise your hand against the boy' the angel said. 'Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son.' Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt-offering in place of his son.

The angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven. 'I swear by my own self – it is the Lord who speaks – because you have done this, because you have not refused me your son, your only son, I will shower blessings on you, I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants shall gain possession of the gates of their enemies. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, as a reward for your obedience.'

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 115 (116):10, 15-19

Response:

I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living. Or Alleluia!

1. I trusted, even when I said: 'I am sorely afflicted,' O precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful. (R.)
2. Your servant, Lord, your servant am I; you have loosened my bonds. A thanksgiving sacrifice I make; I will call on the Lord's name. (R.)
3. My vows to the Lord I will fulfil before all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. (R.)

SECOND READING Romans 8:31-34

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans.
With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give. Could anyone accuse those that God has chosen? When God acquits, could anyone condemn? Could Christ Jesus? No! He not only died for us – he rose from the dead, and there at God's right hand he stands and pleads for us.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION
Glory and praise to you, O Christ!
From the bright cloud the Father's voice was heard:
'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'
Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

GOSPEL Mark 9:2-10

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.
Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus: 'Rabbi,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH
I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS
May this sacrifice, O Lord, we pray, cleanse us of our faults and sanctify your faithful in body and mind for the celebration of the paschal festivities. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON
This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;
listen to him.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION
As we receive these glorious mysteries, we make thanksgiving to you, O Lord, for allowing us while still on earth to be partakers even now of the things of heaven. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE
Bless your faithful, we pray, O Lord, with a blessing that endures for ever, and keep them faithful to the Gospel of your Only Begotten Son, so that they may always desire and at last attain that glory whose beauty he showed in his own Body, to the amazement of his Apostles. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lent is like a long 'retreat' during which we can turn back into ourselves and listen to the voice of God, in order to defeat the temptations of the Evil One. It is a period of spiritual 'combat' which we must experience alongside Jesus, not with pride and presumption, but using the arms of faith: prayer, listening to the word of God and penance. In this way we will be able to celebrate Easter in truth, ready to renew the promises of our Baptism.

Pope Benedict XVI