

Second Sunday in Lent (A)

March 16, 2014.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid' (Mt. 17:7)

On the second Sunday in Lent we always read the Gospel of the Transfiguration of our Lord. We do so in order that our focus may be directed towards the glory of Easter and our Lord's victory over sin and death by His glorious Resurrection. Our Lenten penance is not an end in itself but a means to an end; that cleansed of our faults and sanctified in both body and mind we might more fully appreciate and participate in God's own glory. The word that Sacred Scripture most commonly uses to describe the nature of God is *glory*. Quite rightly we associate *glory* with power, majesty, radiance, awe and wonder. Yet, all the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, speak of God's humiliation as His exaltation, His *glory*. By faith, we are seized by the beauty and glory of the Crucified Christ. In this mystery of the Transfiguration a twofold glory is revealed: the glory which our Lord possesses as the eternal Son of the Father and the glory that is manifested in His sacred Passion; the glory that is manifested from the unsurpassable torture of Holy Week. God Himself is "*whipped to blood, crowned with thorns, mocked, spat upon, ridiculed, nailed, pierced...In this consummate ugliness, this unspeakable outrage, shines a picture of divine beauty,*" of divine *glory*. The Gospel of the Transfiguration presents us with a vision of the glory of God on its way to the Passion (Hans Urs Von Balthasar).

The glory revealed to Peter, James and John is a glimpse of the glory of the Resurrection, a glory that we too are destined to share; however, it is the Passion that *leads to the glory of the Resurrection* (Preface for the Second Sunday in Lent, *The Roman Missal*). Consequently, we are ever mindful that *we preach Christ crucified...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1Cor. 1:23-24* Our Lord Jesus Christ *is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of His nature (Heb.1:3)*. Those who gaze on the Crucified Christ in faith are able to perceive that His hour of highest spiritual beauty – and *glory* – is a moment of utmost bodily degradation. In His humiliation of the Cross the Saviour brings near and makes visible the divine *glory* for we see in Him the ineffable love of God for sinners. This is a love, a beauty and a glory that can only be perceived by a prayerful, contemplative gaze. It is only by means of prayer and penance that we can come to some understanding of why our Lord brought about our salvation in such weakness, diminishment and pain. No human life is exempt from diminishment and pain. If we are given the grace to grow older, the weight of years alone brings about diminishment. Why must it be so? Perhaps our own diminishment is meant to conform us to the self-emptying of the Son of God on the Cross. This may very well be the grace of old age. That our redemption has taken place through suffering of the flesh and spilling of blood may mean that it could take place in no other way. It is for this reason that above all things we must seek simply to be with Jesus and to learn from Him what He alone can teach us in the silence of prayer. On the Cross we have the ultimate and only adequate answer to the problem of evil, the only solution to the mystery of sin. The world's redemption could only be brought about "*in the mystery of a love that by suffering understands all the insults inflicted upon it*" (Hans Urs Von Balthasar). Our profession of faith, if taken seriously, is journey into the depth of this Mystery.

What do we discover as we come to know more of this mystery? Quite simply, that the essence of Christian discipleship is to be with Jesus and to learn from Him who accompanies us on life's journey and who is never distant from us by means of His grace. We must endeavour to abandon ourselves to the will of the Father as He did, and in this is our peace: not only our peace but also our way to holiness, to *glory*. St. Paul reminds us in our second reading that God has *saved and called us to a holy life* (2 Tim. 1:9). A holy life is our *glory* and the means by which we glorify God and participate in His own life, even now. It is in light of this universal call to holiness that we should consider not only our Lenten discipline but also our own life, generally speaking. Holiness is a concept that is too often misunderstood; yet it is the duty of all. *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves, in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy"* (1 Pet. 1: 14-16). We should regard our annual observances of holy Lent as a time of special effort to grow in holiness and in our understanding of the riches hidden in Christ our Lord; as a time when we commit ourselves anew and with greater fervour to the Christian life which, by its very nature and purpose is a call to share in the holiness of God Himself.

The entire virtue of what we call holiness lies in faithfulness to what God ordains. (The Joy of Full Surrender, (Paraclete Press), p.17). Surely, this is what we learn when we contemplate the life and Passion of our Lord. Fidelity to duty, discipline of life, moral rectitude; these are the ways in which we are faithful to what God ordains. They are no less the means by which our lives are so transformed and so transfigured that we come *to live for the praise of his glory* (Eph. 1:12). Anything that contradicts these principles is a path to misery and destruction. Thus we look *to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. 12:2). The freedom from sin that God offers us is freely given to us but it comes to us at a great price for we *are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith* (Rom. 3:24-25). After His glorious resurrection our Lord asked the disciples on the road to Emmaus, *Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?* (Lk. 24:26) And so it is with us; we must be willing to recognize what is best for us in what God ordains for us. *The entire virtue of what we call holiness lies in faithfulness to what God ordains.* Like the disciples on the mountain, the revelation of God's will for us, whether it be in the suffering that He asks of us or permits us to endure, or simply in the challenges that we face in living; these may confound us and might even cause us to be very much afraid. *But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.'* The tenderness of this scene reveals to us something of the compassion of the God whom we worship and adore. He is near. He has borne our burdens. Though He dwells in unapproachable light, He has made known to us His desire to share His *glory* with us and in His Passion He has become the means by which we attain this *glory*. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us* (Eph. 1:7-8).

Like Peter, James and John, we too are privileged to perceive the glory of the Lord; a glory however that is veiled in the poverty, humility and vulnerability of the Crucifix that hangs before us and in the Sacrament of the Cross, the Eucharist. These reveal a love so powerful that neither hate nor death could conquer it. Because we receive and worship this Sacrament, this same love is at work in the

hearts of all who believe. By its power great deeds of love are done and by its power our understanding increases and deepens so that in time, we come to see and to understand that the Passion of our Lord gives a human face to the love of God for a fallen humanity; and that our own sufferings, mysterious as they may be in both their origin and purpose, place us in the very heart of the Paschal Mystery. Suffering is not meaningless nor is it without purpose, and neither is our life. *Nothing short of suffering, except in rare cases, makes us what we should be; gentle instead of harsh, meek instead of violent, conceding instead of arrogant, lowly instead of proud, pure-hearted instead of sensual* (Bl. John Henry Newman, "The Sweet Yoke of Christ," 1839). May we be generous in our sacrifices and single-minded in our desire for holiness of life; *that in all things God may be glorified* (1Pet. 4:11).