

Last Sunday in Epiphany — The Transfiguration of Our Lord. 18 February 2007

St Philip's O'Connor

Exodus 34.29-35; Psalm 99; Luke 9.28-36 2 Corinthians 3:12-4.2

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Way back in January, we heard the story of the Magi — the wise men — searching for the child born to be the Messiah. That was Epiphany, and the whole purpose of the story was to point out that God's purpose in Christ was to be made known to the Gentiles — which simply means all the nations beyond Israel.

Through the following weeks of Epiphany, there was an uncovering of whom this Christ is. Today we come to the final Sunday of Epiphany, to discover that this Jesus is the one in whom God's glory is made known.

In this transfiguration story, the brightness of Jesus' appearance recalls Moses's shining face after he had encountered God. But Jesus' whole being seems to radiate the brightness of God's glory!

Not only that, but Peter, James and John see the glory of God in Jesus, associated with the presence of Moses and Elijah — Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets. So for Peter, James and John, all that spoke of God was now found in Jesus. This is a most wonderful epiphany!

But there is a conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah about Jesus "departure", which he is to accomplish at Jerusalem. Of course we know what that meant. As we look back, we can make the connection between God's glory being seen in Jesus — and the cross. Was Luke trying to say that an even greater epiphany of God's glory was to be seen in Jesus on the cross?

So this day gets us to focus of the transforming glory of God at work in Jesus. It makes us think of change and how we come to see things differently.

It's useful for us to ponder this story of the disciples' experience and the way they came to understand Jesus' presence among them, because the journey then began to head to Jerusalem and the tough road of the cross.

For us, to ponder how we understand God's presence in Christ, brings us to join that journey to the cross through Lent. Beginning at Wednesday (Ash Wednesday) Lent offers us time to reassess our priorities and to look again to the grace of God's Spirit in our lives to change and transform.

So it seems today that we are like Peter, James and John — seeing, experiencing and perceiving God's presence in the person of Jesus. But we take it into our own lives through the transforming journey of faith and repentance, fasting, prayer and giving, which are the disciplines of Lent.

I was challenged to think about change by my attendance at the *Planting New Churches* conference on Wednesday, which could have easily been the "Establishing New Congregations" conference. Martin Robinson, the presenter, asked us to think about how we bridge the gap between our church community and the community around us. He asked how much of our culture sees the Christian church as the problem rather than the answer. He also encouraged us not to have predisposed ideas about the church.

So I asked myself, "What about Peter, James and John? Did they have a predisposed notion of a church with bishops, priests and deacons, with robes, buildings, prayer books, annual general meetings and four hymns on a Sunday?" No. These are some of the things we have and I like them (mostly) and find them helpful. *But*, the question about bridging the gap still remains and our Lenten *repentance* is about how we bridge that gap.

In thinking about our parish structure, I wondered about me getting two days alternative employment and releasing two days pay for a youth or children's worker or for administrative help. I wondered about alternative worship where people tell their stories. I would entitle it, "Growing up in..." and hear a person's story and in a very simple way hear how their faith came to be. I would conclude with some songs and prayer for about 15 minutes, ending with a blessing — including a blessing for the person — and then adjourn to All Bar Nun for more conversation and fellowship.

I put these before you as visions — as ways we might see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and

be transformed with him.

When Paul spoke about his fellow Jews, he spoke about them having predisposed notions – “to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.” [2 Cor. 3.15-16]. Paul goes on to talk about the transformation of those who see God’s glory and begin to be changed.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.” [vv. 17-18]

In the midst of talk about change, Paul calls his readers (and us!) not to lose heart, because it is by God’s mercy that we are called [4.1]. Ultimately the God who changes is also the one who remains constant for us!

Let us ponder what has opened our eyes to know a little more of God and move on with our eyes open to change!