

Today we have had a glimpse of heavenly glory. In fact, we are **flooded** with heavenly light all round! In our first reading we heard the extraordinary account of Elijah ascending in the fiery chariot to the heavens, leaving Elisha with his cloak – a story of great mystery – one of the passing on of the prophetic cry to the world. Paul then uses extraordinary words in that second short reading. We are called to engage with the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. In other words, no matter what besets us, what calamities overwhelm us, no matter how deep the sorrows or depressions we might experience within life, in the Good News of Jesus Christ we have the life-giving knowledge that God is always with us, 'For,' as Paul tells us, 'it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' If that isn't worth getting up on a Sunday morning to hear, I don't know what is!

Then we have the Transfiguration of Jesus when Peter, James and John are drawn to experience a moment of glory on Mount Tabor, after which the Lord turns his face towards Jerusalem. We will start our Lenten journey this week towards the Church's annual pilgrimage remembering the death and resurrection of the one who loves each one of us with so great a love that he was prepared to give everything for you and me to draw **us** into Resurrection Life. What does Lent mean to you? Is it that traditional understanding of prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works? Or is it something else, or nothing at all? What I would like to do is to take you on a bit of a journey of what Lent means to me. I fear that I may get hopelessly muddled in allegory, simile, parable and goodness only knows what else in terms of figures of speech, but I hope you will bear with me!

I was fortunate some years ago to spend a week in Rome on an art study trip during April. It was the Saturday that I took myself off to climb the Janiculum Hill, my destination a church at the top. It was one of those perfect Spring mornings as I climbed until, about halfway up, I came upon a glorious surprise that I had not heard of: the great *Fontana dell'Aqua Paola* – one of those monster fountains of Rome. It was built by Pope Paul V in 1612 to commemorate the restoration of one of the Emperor Trajan's aqueducts which had fallen into disuse during the Roman Empire's decline. Built in imitation of a triumphal arch, water gushes out of five arches into a gigantic basin in which formerly country people travelling into Rome to sell their vegetables would wash their produce. The view over Rome from the fountain is breath-taking.

After this pleasant surprise, I continued up to the hill to my goal- the church of *San Pietro in Montorio*, primarily to see the *Tempietto* in its cloister - the first Renaissance building in Rome. Built by Bramante in 1502, at the command of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, it was erected over the newly rediscovered spot where St Peter was supposedly crucified. However, I fear that the faithful never really took to this in devotional terms and people come now merely to see the *Tempietto*. The church itself is uncharacteristically plain, and this was explained when I read the guide book because it formerly housed Raphael's great painting of the Transfiguration over its high altar. However, Napoleon took a shine to it when he invaded Italy and removed it to Paris, and, after his defeat, the then pope also took

a shine to it and instead of returning it to the church removed it to the Vatican museums where it remains as one of their greatest works of art.

I'm sure that the painting will be well known to many of you. It is perhaps the best-known portrayal of the Transfiguration. The divine revelation takes up roughly the top third of the painting. Jesus floats effortlessly, suffused in light and conversing with Moses and Elijah – representing the Law and the prophets of the Old Testament - and both of whom experienced God's closer presence. I suppose some would say that it's a bit of Renaissance 'high camp' but very beautiful nevertheless. However, the larger part of the painting is taken up by a representation of what follows the account of the Transfiguration in Mark's Gospel. Jesus and the three apostles come down the mountain to find that the other nine have tried- yet failed- to heal a boy who suffers from terrible fits, although Jesus had already given the twelve authority to heal earlier in the Gospel. The account is described in detail by Mark, and the turning point being when Jesus says, 'All things can be done for the one who believes.' The father of the child cries out with great emotion, 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!'

In the lower part of this painting, we are taken into a scene of chaos and darkness – hands are thrust this way and that. It's sometimes a hard balance in life to keep our mind and actions firmly rooted on the knowledge of God's love revealed in the journey which Jesus travels for each of us - not to allow ourselves to be led into spiritual or mental chaos and darkness.

Things must also matter to us as Christians: Syria, Yemen, the plight of the Rohingya Muslims, The Holy Land, global poverty, the starving child in Africa, the tortured dissident in Iran or North Korea. Our faith is one which calls us to be of this world; to be children of action in helping our brothers and sisters. Neither is our faith some wishy-washy love-in, but a faith which transforms the world through God's love- a burning, deep love, revealed in its fullness on the cross. Sometimes, when we experience, or see and hear things which make our hearts break, we may feel that we want to join that cry which the father of the boy makes.

For me, Lent is an opportunity to be halfway up the Janiculum hill by that glorious fountain. A chance to draw a breath and be refreshed, with the clear water glittering in the sunlight as it gushes into the basin. From there, the city is surveyed in its entirety – the world of humanity with its joys, sorrows and emotions. The goal however, is higher. The Transfiguration reminds us that through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we remember, in the words of St Paul, that, 'it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Our life's journey is one towards an ever-growing knowledge of our journey into God's Love. However you decide to observe Lent, allow what you do (or don't do!) to refresh you. Walk with Jesus on the journey he makes for you and be rewarded in knowing that through his death and resurrection, you too are called to be transfigured and united with him in God's Love.

To him be all glory forever. Amen

## 2 Kings 2:1-12

2 Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup> The company of prophets<sup>[a]</sup> who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?' And he said, 'Yes, I know; keep silent.'

<sup>4</sup> Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.' But he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they came to Jericho. <sup>5</sup> The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?' And he answered, 'Yes, I know; be silent.'

<sup>6</sup> Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.' But he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the company of prophets<sup>[c]</sup> also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan.

<sup>8</sup> Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' <sup>10</sup> He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.' <sup>11</sup> As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. <sup>12</sup> Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

## 2 Corinthians 4: 3-6

<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

## Mark 9:2-9

<sup>2</sup> Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one<sup>[a]</sup> on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,<sup>[b]</sup> one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved;<sup>[c]</sup> listen to him!'

<sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

### Collect

Almighty Father,  
whose Son was revealed in majesty  
before he suffered death upon the cross:  
give us grace to perceive his glory,  
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him  
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*Post Communion*

Holy God,

we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ:

may we who are partakers at his table

reflect his life in word and deed,

that all the world may know his power to change and save.

This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

