

## Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent 2022 Year C

Today's Gospel was the story of the Transfiguration.

What lessons can we draw from that story that could be useful for Lent?

The Transfiguration was a high point in St. Peter's life because standing there before him to his delight, on top of the mountain, was absolute proof that Jesus was all that He claimed to be. There He was conversing with two of the great figures of Jewish history, Moses, and Elijah, both of whom had, by tradition, been assumed into Heaven. There was clear proof to Peter that Jesus was at least their equal, if not superior to them. So delighted was Peter that he babbled some nonsense about building 3 tents for them. So, it was all true, He really was the Messiah, and Peter must have felt so happy to have made the right decision and left everything to follow Jesus. In the presence of the Divine, Peter's faith glowed and was strong.

Then, quite suddenly, a dark cloud hid the presence of the Divine, and his sight of a Transfigured Jesus. What a change for Peter. Instead of a strong faith, he was quickly filled with doubt and fear.

What if it had all been an illusion, wishful thinking, and an overactive imagination on his part? In the sudden absence of the divine, Peter's faith, was so fragile that it went through the full swing of the pendulum from joyful faith to a fearful doubt.

Now isn't that a common experience of life for all of us? There are moments of strong faith when God feels very close and real to us. Then there are also darker moments when, for diverse reasons, our faith falters and God seems far away or even doesn't exist at all.

This Lent could, perhaps, be a time when we could learn a whole new discipline in our lives and allow ourselves to experience, understand and come to accept the truth that is very hard to bear, that God Himself is often closer to us, more present to us, in that terrible sense or feeling of His absence than He is when we bask in the consoling sense of His presence.

Lent is not just a symbolic re-enactment of the desert experience of Christ when he fasted and prayed for 40 days. It can become a very real transfiguration experience when we can not only change personal habits of

life, but also just as importantly, the way that we look at and perceive spiritual things.

If for us Lent just becomes a desert experience then it is not an easy thing to endure.

When you enter a desert, you enter a vast, unmarked wilderness, bereft of all that's comfortable and familiar in life, especially the consoling presence of God.

And that's a desert that many of us have experienced, and not just once in our lives.

If we could but learn to open our eyes to see it, here we have a whole new experience of God, a totally different type of experience of God. A very real presence of God in that lonely and painful feeling of the total absence of God.

Like Peter on Mount Tabor, something suddenly happens in our lives, and we can no longer see or feel the Divine. The clouds surround us, and the light goes out. But Peter, in that darkness, heard a voice reassuring him that Christ was still there, and, more importantly, gave him the advice, "Listen to Him".

Maybe that is part of the lesson that we need to learn, that, when in our darkness, we lose all sight and feel of the consoling presence of the Divine, if we could only learn how to listen, we could perhaps come to a new experience of the Divine.

But listen to what? When we come to live in the desert of the absence of a sense of God, nothing is more painful than the utter silence of God. In our darkness, in our desert, He is not there; we can't see Him; we can't feel Him; we can't hear Him.

And we would be wrong, and this is where the notion of transfiguration comes in once more, for we have to learn the difficult task of changing how we look at and interpret things, to open ourselves to a new experience of God.

If we make the effort and try to listen and we are then disappointed by the oppressive silence, it is because of the way we understand and look at silence.

Most people understand silence to be an empty thing, the total absence of noise and sound. But if we can now turn this completely on its head and see silence not as an emptiness, but as something full, waiting, and pregnant with

all sorts of possibilities. All sound, echoes, and reverberations in a sea of silence. Silence is not empty; it is the very thing that brings sound to us.

Likewise, the silence of God is not empty of God, but rather a new set of conditions to bear a new experience of God to us, but only if we are prepared to listen and to open ourselves up to a new experience of this same God who seems to have withdrawn Himself from us.

When the clouds and darkness lifted, Peter would have learnt with great relief that Christ was still there, that all the time Christ had been present with him, though, he, Peter, had felt him in a different way, as a loss or as an absence.

So maybe this Lent a lesson that we too could learn is that God does not cease to exist just because we cannot sense or feel Him. He is still there even though all we are feeling is His absence. This absence can give us great hope and encouragement, it can stave off despair. If we can understand and accept that our feelings of the loss or absence of God is a new different and difficult way of experiencing the presence of God.

That just as silence bears sound to us, so too the feeling of the absence of God makes him present to us, but in a different way!