

Second Sunday in Lent

While Jesus was praying, his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and they spoke with him about his exodus - the exodus he was about to complete in Jerusalem. Luke 9, 28-36



At some time in our lives, we all have the experience of meeting someone whose goodness is so palpable that it just shines out of her or him. The encounter makes an indelible impression on us. Intuitively, we know we have brushed the holy.

Sunday's gospel reading gives us Luke's rendition of what happened when Peter, James and John had an encounter with the holy. Jesus had taken them to a mountain retreat to pray, and, as he prayed, his sheer goodness so shone out of him that it dazzled them. Peter's first reaction was "to get a photo". The experience was so uplifting for him that he wanted to capture it forever. Jesus was quick to remind him that real life is lived at a different level. While we might occasionally have heightened religious or emotional experiences, life provides us with our share of frustration, mess, disappointment and pain.

We can all recall times when we were sure that "God was in his heaven and everything was right with the world". Winning a job promotion, receiving public recognition for achievements, being elected to a position of leadership, making a life commitment, becoming parents for the first time can all be really uplifting experiences which bring us boundless happiness. For most of us, however, the joy fades with time and with the interpersonal conflicts and relational challenges that intrude to unsettle our equilibrium.

Peter was being unreal, and Jesus told him so. We, too, can be unreal, and today's gospel is a reminder to us of that. But it is much more. It not only points to the fact that the escapism which the world of consumerism offers us is ephemeral but that lasting transformation (transfiguration) requires persevering commitment and is not without personal cost.

Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah are seen by the three apostles talking with Jesus about his "exodus" - the painful journey he will have to negotiate through torture and death to the freedom of resurrection. Luke makes it clear that this is the story not only of every follower of Jesus, but of every human life. We might be spared torture, but we will all know pain and hurt, and much of it will come from other people.

The Jewish writer, Harold Kushner, tells the story of Sara, a woman who, in her youth, suffered from bulimia. The adults around her could not understand the cause of her uncontrollable behaviour, nor could she. Sara eventually found the inner strength to fight her disease and conquer it. Years later, the now happily married Sara, read a story in her local newspaper of a support group that was being established for people suffering from bulimia. The organisers of the support group had issued an invitation for people prepared to volunteer to attend a meeting in the local community hall. Though long recovered from her own nightmare, she was taken by the idea of a

support group and fronted up at the scheduled meeting. There she met other volunteers and a group of young women who were clearly desperately ill. Their plight touched her deeply and she signed up to be part of the support group. Even though she had been through a similar experience herself, she felt powerless to help. Deep down she cared for the young women she was asked to support, but, apart from telling them that she had suffered from bulimia herself, she simply turned up faithfully to each meeting and quietly listened to the girls as they told their stories. At the conclusion of one of the meetings as she was about to leave, Sara was approached by a match-stick thin girl who thanked her for coming each week and told her how much she appreciated her presence. Sara responded graciously to the tearful girl but was puzzled because she could not remember having spoken directly to this particular girl. In fact, she didn't even know the girl's name. As she drove home, Sara started wondering how she could have forgotten something so important to someone else. She was almost home when it dawned on her. When she came into the house, she was met by her husband who was surprised to see that she had been crying. "Sara, what's the matter?" he asked. A smile broke through her tears as she happily replied: "Harry, I've become the person I needed to meet." (cf Harold S. Kushner, *Overcoming Life's Disappointments* p 74)

God's Spirit lives within each of us. By listening and responding to God's Spirit, we grow into the people God invites us to be. We know from our life experience that such growth does not come easily. That's the same Spirit whom Peter, James and John saw in Jesus on the mountain. And that's the Spirit who shines through us when we live with integrity and authenticity, even though we might not be conscious of it. Like Sara, we can become agents for transfiguration to others, simply by being our true selves.