

PROJECT COMPASSION & TRANSFIGURATION

Mt 17.1-9 Gen 12.1-4, 3.1-7 2Tim 1.8-10

We might well wonder why Transfiguration pops up every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, following the account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert, a reminder of the reality of life's temptations for all of us, and the need to face them with determination, will power and good conscience. Transfiguration is a further mystery, depicting Jesus in a moment of revelation, where his glory and divinity are revealed, but only for a transitory insight into his identity. The paradox remains, too, that suffering is a part of the deal, as Peter, James and John are also to the fore, present in the Garden during his agony prior to crucifixion and death, leading to resurrection and fulfilment.

To me, this account reminds me of the fact that we can't live on Cloud 9 in Nirvana for all of our lives, just enjoying the high points and wanting to stay up there. We're going to fall back to earth through the cloud every time, but that's not to say we can't treasure the peak moments of happiness, love and success we experience in life, and be sustained and inspired by the memories. But we can't live in the past either. And, for all of us, there are the darker, more difficult periods in life, where we have to wrestle with ourselves, facing up to our demons, our failures, weaknesses, losses, illness, sadness, grief, and ultimately, mortality!

It strikes me as a very good thing, with funerals, in particular, that what has become relatively common as part of the celebration of a person's life, are the eulogies and the slide show reflection, highlighting the happy moments of family, friendship and fun, along with a lived Christian faith in action, and this is more than appropriate!

The naysayers are critical of this secular intrusion, as they'd see it, into the sacred liturgy of Christian commemoration and commendation of the person who has died, to a God of life, love and mystery. Counter to this, I see it very much as part of the process of grieving, remembering and celebrating faith and life, learning from the goodness and example of this person, as well as giving thanks for his or her life and love, without canonising or pretending perfection, but also acknowledging our common flawed humanity, focussing on strengths, without denying foibles and failures along this particular individual's journey of life.

(In fact, I could almost feel I was in a film at the moment, in between 4 funerals and a wedding – balanced by 7 Baptisms and 2 more weddings in February, and now another 2 funerals or this coming week!)

Striking a balance between the spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the secular, and getting our own act together, on the physical, spiritual, psychological and emotional levels is a lifelong

process, as we weave our way through life and the challenges it throws up at us, as would-be faithful disciples.

Transfiguration for Peter, James and John is a reiteration of the true identity of Jesus, affirmed by the Father as his beloved Son, as at Jesus' baptism by John. He comes among us as the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets symbolized by Moses and Elijah respectively.

Then, as do we all, they descend the mountain, from the divine cloud of revelation and unknowing together, to continue the winding path of discipleship and for Jesus to his itinerant preaching, teaching and healing mission, all the way to the Cross and ultimate victory over sin and death. As Brendan Byrne SJ says: *“The disciples (specifically Peter) want to ‘hold the messianic moment (‘Let us build 3 tents...’). But there are no ‘shortcuts’ to glory. From now on, precisely as God’s beloved Son, Jesus is to treat the path to Jerusalem as the Messiah who came, not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many’.” (Mt 20.28)* And so we continue our Lenten journey.

The Project Compassion theme this year is **“Go Further Together”**, as we view an account of life for Phany and her family, developing farming in Cambodia, once again reminding us of the great work being supported by Caritas Australia through Project Compassion.

We might once again conclude with a prayer together, with slideshow, based on our themes for Lent:

God of all peoples and nations, as you accompany us on our Lenten journey, may our fasting strengthen our commitment to live in solidarity, our almsgiving be an act of justice, and our prayers anchor us in love and compassion. Awaken our hearts and minds that we might be one human family as we all go further together. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

john hannon

8th March 2020