

23rd February 2020
10 Parish Eucharist
Sunday next before Lent

Today's Gospel is about the Transfiguration.

I visited the mountain where it takes place when I visited the Holy Land.

We went in a coach from our hotel, but a little way up the mountain

We transferred from the main coach to minibuses with specialist drivers to take us to the top.

The thing that was special about the driver I had was that he obviously had the power to see round blind corners to judge by his driving.

He drove up the twisty tracks at the speed I would drive on a motorway.

However, the drive was almost worth it.

Because the mountain towers over the fertile plains below it.

It is dominant, isolated and unmissable.

Now climbing a mountain is always an inspiring thing to do.

It quite literally changes your perspective.

The first real mountain I climbed was Snowdon when I was about 12.

I have climbed many since and they always take my breath away.

Not just because I'm unfit, but because you can look down on the world below.

A new perspective.

Just as the people you look down on seem small, often problems get into perspective and seem small.

So mountains are places we get things in perspective and are exhilarating.

They can also seem scary places.

We stand on the edge and with one wrong step, that is the end.

So places of perspective, places of exhilaration and places of fear.

And there is another perspective.

For Jews, mountains were holy places.

Think of Moses going up the mountain to meet God.

The Jewish people felt they were closer to God on a mountain.

Now, Matthew's account of the Transfiguration contains all those aspects of mountains.

For the three disciples it must have been exhilarating but frightening.

Wonderful but terrifying.

And it must have put Jesus' ministry into perspective.

He prayed and he was transfigured before them like Moses when he met God.

It is one of the most mysterious accounts in the Gospels.

A holy encounter in a sacred place.

An encounter with Moses representing the law, and Elijah the prophets.

And God's affirmation of Jesus.

"This is my son, the chosen, listen to him."

Peter of course was so transfixed that he wanted to make the experience permanent and build some dwellings.

But it was not to be.

The moment had gone.

Jesus, Peter, James and John had to go down the mountain to the plain.

The Plain of Jezreel.

Where Deborah had defeated the Caananites.

It is also called the Plain of Armageddon, where according to the book of Revelation the final battle between good and evil will be played out.

So the apostles descended from the Mount of Transfiguration.

That place of divine presence.

To reality, the place of battle.

The valley floor represents life as it is.

It can be beautiful and fertile, but it can be a place of battle.

When those three disciples faced the battles of life which we know they did, they must have looked back on their experience on Mount Tabor to give them strength and inspiration.

It equipped the disciples for what was to come.

We of course live on the plain.

We face battles in our lives.

They may be to do with money, or ill health, relationship problems, bereavement or work problems.

We may be disturbed by world problems, inequality in this country or international tensions in the middle East or the problems of climate change.

Where do we get our strength?

Our Lord gave us a gift of strength and inspiration.

He gave it to us at the Last Supper.

And the church has developed this gift into the Eucharist.

Here we meet with God.

We meet him in the scripture readings.

We meet him in the prayers.

We meet him supremely in the Blessed Sacrament, where we have a physical contact with him.

Here we feel we are with God.

We are inspired and strengthened.

A member of St Mary's congregation said to me two weeks ago, "I need to come to Mass to cope with the week."

And so do I.

Of course we cannot be at the Eucharist all the time.

We have to leave the holy presence of God and go into the real world.

The valley, the plain of battle.

But when we come across those battles we can look back at the Eucharist where we have come face to face with God.

Where we have been transfigured.

And we can then be agents of transfiguration in the world.