

## Lectio Divina – 2nd Sunday of Lent - Year B

### Contexts

#### Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- The Gospel is an 'action story', things happen quickly. Mark's use of 'immediately' occurs so often in the Gospel that the word is often omitted from translations.
- The disciples aren't heroes; they are more like us – well intentioned, sometimes misguided and stubborn men and women. One moment they can be admirable and the next so very dense, lacking all comprehension of what is really happening. Discipleship is a big concern in this Gospel. (Jude Siciliano OP)
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

#### Mark 9:2-10

- Note that this Gospel episode occurs in the context of Jesus' clash with Peter about his eventual rejection, suffering, death and resurrection.
- 'A pattern is emerging: the passion prediction is followed by failure on the part of the disciples (to understand), yet Jesus does not abandon them in their failure. He calls them and instructs them further on the nature of true discipleship'. (Frank Moloney)
- The story begins with, 'Six days later...' but that phrase is omitted from the Lectionary.
- Peter, James & John – the inner circle of disciples who are also mentioned as being present in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- 'led them up a high mountain..' (the mountain is not identified, perhaps Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon which is closer to where Mark says Jesus was, near Caesarea Philippi) 'where they could be alone by themselves.'
- Mountains are favourite places in scripture where God reveals himself in one way or another (theophanies) – and the traditional place where human beings meet God.
- 'he was transfigured' – the Greek word indicates a change of form indicating that Jesus was not just 'transformed' but 'transfigured'. It is difficult to understand exactly what the experience being described here is. It seems to indicate that Jesus' transfiguration comes from within. Jesus is not basking in God's reflected glory, he glows with the glory within.
- Even his clothes appear dazzlingly bright.

- Elijah and Moses appear with him – the presence of these two is often explained as the two representing the OT traditions of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). It is interesting that Mark reverses the order of appearance ('Elijah with Moses appeared to them'). These are talking with Jesus – Mark does not say what it is they are talking about (Luke does).
- 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here' – Peter's reflection on the experience of this unique and extraordinary happening. The use of 'Rabbi' rather than Lord (Matthew) or Master (Luke) is interesting.
- '...build three tents...' perhaps this is Peter's attempt to prolong the experience – building tents (tabernacles, dwelling places) so that the 3 will stay or the experience will be prolonged. Jesus' destiny lies in Jerusalem not enfolded in a tent on a mountain (FM)
- 'a cloud overshadowed them...' God's presence in cloud is a feature of the Exodus story, so the voice which comes from the cloud is the divine voice.
- 'This is my son, the beloved; listen to him.' 'The disciples, who have been told of the need to take up their own cross (8:34) and have heard Jesus' telling of his future suffering and death in Jerusalem, are instructed that they must listen to him, as he is the beloved Son of God.' (FM)
- The vision ends abruptly and Jesus is seen alone. He leads them down the mountain and (once again) instructs them to tell no one until after he has risen from the dead. Again, this command to silence is part of Mark's insistence that the true identity of Jesus can only be found at the Cross, not in glorious visions. For Mark, the journey to belief in Jesus must be based on real faith (real relationship) not on marvellous experiences or fantasies. There is a hard edge to faith in Jesus – it involved suffering and sometimes death, taking up the cross daily, etc.
- '... they discussed among themselves what 'rising from the dead' could mean' – perhaps the disciples are struggling with how Jesus' resurrection could come before and apart from the general resurrection expected at the coming of God's kingdom. It is interesting that the disciples are struggling with both the passion and death of Jesus and his resurrection. Still struggling with this, they ask Jesus about it, but those verses are not included in the reading for this Sunday.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on for this Sunday?

Note that, no matter which reading cycle we use, the First and Second Sundays in Lent always have the same two episodes from the life of Jesus: temptation and transfiguration.

This Sunday's Gospel of the Transfiguration completes the 'little parable' formed by the Gospels of the first two Sundays of Lent.

These Gospels tell us what Lent is about and what Christian life is about: a constant journey from temptation and doubt to transfiguration and faith.

Transfiguration means to be 'shot-through' with the presence of God. Being transfigured is about allowing the presence of God to completely transform us. It is a revolution of mind and heart driven by God's Spirit and enabled by our open heartedness. Our life as Christians is about being transfigured by the Spirit of God so that God is seen in, and experienced through, us. That is what Peter, James and John saw in the transfigured Jesus.

The journey to transfiguration requires faith and perseverance. The story of Abraham in the first reading is a story of great faith and trust. Abraham faced the loss of his dearly

loved son, the source of all his hope for the future. He trusted and his son was spared. That was a clear sign to Abraham (and to readers of the story) that God is about bringing life, not death, to his people.

It takes faith and perseverance to dare to allow ourselves to be driven by the passion, hope and vision of God rather than our own desires and wants. Listening to the living word of the 'Beloved Son' forms in us the heart of God.

How do we get from temptation to transfiguration? The Year B readings suggest:

Only in Jesus who  
cleanses, heals and restores (Sunday 3)  
raises us to true life; who is the source of eternal life (Sunday 4)  
is God's forgiveness in action and salvation for all (Sunday 5)