

27 February - 5 March 2022 Luke 9: 28-36, (37-43)

Pilgrims progress

Read the passage from Luke. It is written below.

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" — not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Bible notes

I wonder how we would have reacted if we had been part of the 'mountaintop experience', usually known as the Transfiguration? It was such an extraordinary encounter with the divine possibilities of prayer that I suspect we might have struggled to react at all. For, if we were like those first disciples, we would already have known that Jesus was special, but we would not have been prepared for Jesus' prayer to bring him into the company of those heroes of faith, Moses and Elijah.

Peter – always the boldest of the disciples – reacts in a way that might surprise us: he offers to build dwellings or booths for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Actually, Peter’s instinct is not completely off-key. The Festival of Booths (Sukkot), according to Leviticus, celebrates the end of the Hebrews’ 40 years in the Wilderness. So, Peter understands, perhaps, that with the arrival of Jesus, the Promised Land is close. Indeed, more than that, he grasps at some unconscious level how Jesus stands as the equal of Moses and Elijah. If Moses is the master of the sea, so is Jesus (who calms the storm, and brings forth a huge haul of fish). If Elijah raises from the dead and feeds in the wilderness, so does Jesus.

Yet, even Peter does not yet grasp the truth: that Jesus is more. He is the Son of God, and soon he and his disciples will turn their attention towards its full implications: Jerusalem and the Cross that lies at the end of the road. The kingdom into which Jesus invites us subverts our every expectation.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The concept of a ‘mountaintop experience’ has entered common parlance. It is used to suggest intense experiences or moments when we are so taken away from ordinary life that we encounter something greater than ourselves or see something more clearly, even gain new insights (a vision?). Whether you’ve had such an experience or not, what value do you think we should place on these powerful experiences? Can they teach us things? Should they be received as a gift to help us on our journeys? How can we ‘carry the moment’ with us in our everyday life? What does today’s Gospel reading suggest as answers to these questions?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



Questions

- How do you capture/mark moments of change?
- What things can distract you and sometimes mean you miss the moment?
- How can you 'stay in the moment' to enjoy the full experience in life's important moments?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

A prayer of praise

Father, this time two years ago,
the world began to change as the pandemic took hold.
It set us on a path we could not have imagined,
a rollercoaster of fear and despair.
We thank you for being with us every step of the way.
Thank you for the times when we witnessed the best of humanity;
for those who selflessly worked to save lives,
produce vaccines and keep the country running;
for those who raised funds and spirits.
For every time you sent someone
or something to lift us up, O Lord,
we give thanks and praise;
for every day you helped us to carry on
when the tunnel was long
and the light at the end of it dim,
we praise your holy name.

The world has changed, and we have been changed;
let us take what we have seen and learned
to light our pilgrim way ever more.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Father, thank you that you are transforming us every day.
We pray that, not only will we have mountaintop experiences,
but also that we will know your presence with us
in our everyday and ordinary moments.
May we be continually astounded at your greatness,
and may it show in our lives.

Amen.