

THE TRANSFIGURATION

On the Second Sunday of Lent each year we read about the Transfiguration. This Sunday we will hear Matthew's account (Mt 17:1-9).

In Matthew's Gospel, this scene takes place as Jesus and the disciples begin the journey to Jerusalem. The focus for Jesus has changed. As the opposition to his mission grows, Jesus turns his attention to the group of disciples who have followed him from Galilee.

The disciples still do not understand his mission and so Jesus makes it clear that when they reach Jerusalem he will be killed and on the third day be raised (Mt 16:21). But Peter and the other disciples struggle to understand. Jesus makes it clear that those who wish to follow him will also need to take up the cross.

That leads us into the next scene, the Transfiguration. However, our Gospel reading has left out the opening three words that begin Matthew's account (Mt 17:1): "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain." Why the reference to **six days later**?

For Matthew, this scene continues to present Jesus as the new Moses. In the Book of Exodus (Ex 24:12-18) when God called Moses to climb Mt Sinai, a cloud covered the mountain for six days. On the seventh day (that is, six days later) God called from within the cloud and Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is transformed and then Moses and Elijah appeared with him. Moses and Elijah are the two figures in the Old Testament who both experienced an encounter with God on a mountain.

A bright cloud, a sign of the presence of God, covers the disciples and they hear the same message that is in Matthew's account of the Baptism of Jesus: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him."

In the context of the earlier prediction of the Passion those words, "Listen to him", are addressed to the disciples. Peter had questioned what Jesus had told them when he said that he would be killed in Jerusalem. Now they are told again to listen to him.

The Passion and Death of Jesus is still to come but the Transfiguration provides a glimpse of the encounter the disciples would have with the Risen Jesus after his Resurrection.

For Matthew's community and for us, it is also a reminder that the Risen Jesus is with us on our journey, even when things happen that we do not understand.

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Published in St Mary's Parish Concord Bulletin 2023