

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Lent (A)

1<sup>st</sup> March 2026

'The Transfiguration: experiencing Jesus's love'

Gen 12: the call of Abraham

2Tim1: *He abolished death ... proclaimed life*

Mt 17: 1–9: the Transfiguration.

My undergraduate university chaplain — a Benedictine monk, Fr Chris — used to complain, tongue in cheek, that the Transfiguration was *constantly* cropping up in the readings! “How does it keep coming up, again and again?” Well, he’s right, it sort-of does. We get the Transfiguration Gospel once in the weekday cycle (Sat of Wk 6: Mk 9); then on the actual feast of the Transfiguration (6<sup>th</sup> Aug: Mt/Mk/Lk); and then again, every year, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent — today (Mt/Mk/Lk). It’s an important passage, for sure, a startling and unique event, and all three of the synoptic Gospels Mt/Mk/Lk include it. And we get reference to it in St Peter’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter when he recounts the striking nature of seeing Jesus’s glory revealed:

*[16] For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

*[17] For when He received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” [18] we ourselves heard this very*

*voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet 1, ESV)*

But why do we get it in Lent, on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, every year? OK, we’ll come back to that.

One of our aims in Lent is to give more time to the Lord in *prayer* — as well as giving ourselves a bit less, in *fasting*; and giving others a bit more, in *almsgiving*: our 3-fold Lenten practice. An ideal way to spend committed time with the Lord, gently, daily, in Lent, would be to read through one of the Gospels, cover to cover, over the course of these 40+ days. That wouldn’t mean more than about 1page/day — just 10–15 mins, even adding in some quiet time to follow on from your reading. *There are many advantages to this*, adding to your hearing the Word in Mass: one is that you don’t miss any of the text that might be skipped in the Sunday lectionary; a second is that you can see how the different events of Our Lord’s life fit together: what comes before, what comes after, what is the context of a particular passage. If you notice, today, for example, Jesus’s Transfiguration is in ch. 17. That’s a big jump from the early chapters of Matthew that we were

hearing from on the Sundays of January and February, including last week (Our Lord in the wilderness, ch. 4).

*The context of the Transfiguration*, this unparalleled moment of Jesus's revealing divine glory, is that He has just been to Caesarea Philippi, and been proclaimed there by St Peter "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (ch. 16). Immediately afterwards Jesus tells the apostles that He is *destined to suffer, to be put to death, and to rise again*. So it's as if the Lord now needs to strengthen those closest three of His apostles, Peter, James & John, in the light of what He has predicted to them. If they're to understand that His Messiahship leads to the Passion, and that His Death leads to the Resurrection, then presumably they need to know, deep down, that He truly is the Son of God? Note that this very same sequence — Caesarea Philippi for the Profession of Faith by St Peter; then the prediction of the Passion; followed by Mt Tabor, the Transfiguration — is also in the Gospels of Mark (Mk 8/9) and Luke (Lk 9). Is that what the Transfiguration is about — making sure that three of them, at least, have a clue what's really going on?

Yes — I'm sure that's true, so far as it goes. It's a truly astonishing manifestation (though still, let's remember, only a *glimpse*) of Jesus's true nature as the living God Himself. And the apostles were amazed by it, and really rather afraid. But a while back I was at Aylesford Priory for the day, and one of the Carmelite friars was giving a Lent talk and he put a rather different perspective on this event. Was it, he said, mostly about *knowledge* (extra evidence and facts about Jesus Himself given to the apostles) or was it mostly about *love* (revealing His inner life to them as a source of devotion)? In other words, was the Transfiguration mostly a *lesson to be learnt*, or was it instead a *love to be felt*? The two aren't mutually exclusive, of course, but which was uppermost in the mind of Christ? Which was the primary motive in His heart? I suspect that the friar might have been right — it was mostly about Jesus's showing love to the apostles. So slow on the uptake, as they are; so slow to take everything in; "so slow to understand the full message of the prophets" — as Jesus will repeat in a few weeks, on the

road to Emmaus. He wants to them to see and feel His inner life, His love and mercy, streaming out from His divine heart. Yes, they do feel afraid, they fall on their faces when the cloud of divine mystery covers them and the heavenly Father's voice speaks; but Jesus reassures them, "*Rise, and have no fear.*" He cannot reveal His divine love without, in one sense, overwhelming them. That's surely why it's a momentary event, perhaps lasting just a few minutes. But He needs them to know, above all things, that His love for them, and for the world, is greater than anything, greater than anything fearful — it'll be greater even than the horrific death that He will be subjected to. *Fortis ut mors dilectio* (Song of Songs 8:6).

We need to let this bright light of the Jesus's Transfiguration shine on our Lent. Lent need not be a dark, sombre, time! It's penitential, yes, but that's so we can take down the barriers that typically are baffles to the light. Let's allow ourselves in Lent to be changed by this enlightening knowledge — which is not the simple, bare, 'facts'-knowledge of Jesus's divinity, but is the

experienced, heartfelt, inner peace that comes with knowing the true *love* of the Son of God for us. The light of His love, shining more brightly than any earthly darkness, casts away our fears, strengthens us to trust in Him, means we can openly admit to Him our sins and have the motivation to do real good.

The light of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent is quite clearly a precursor to the light of Easter. The Easter Vigil in 5 weeks' time will be all about light: not a passing glimpse, or a blinding, scary light, but a lasting, eternal one that draws us up in to heaven. But for now we still need to live Lent, and make this whole season one of letting in the light. "*Lord, it is good that we are here,*" says St Peter — this is his follow-up to "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" remember. *It is good that we are here,* keeping Sunday Mass, keeping Lent, longing for Easter, longing for eternal light, not afraid to face the light; knowing that the One who wants to shine His searching light into our souls this Lent (and make them "*whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them*")... *loves us.*