

**St Botolph's Church Worthing**  
**Sunday Before Lent Luke 9: 28-36, I Corinthians 3:12 – 4:2**  
**Father Roger Walker**

Lent begins this Wednesday and the story of Jesus' Transfiguration seems a very unlikely Reading to choose to prepare for Lent – but there is a good reason for this, as it marks the beginning of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, where he will be betrayed, crucified and will rise again.

In each of the three so-called Synoptic gospels - Matthew Mark and Luke - synoptic means seeing with the same eye, and each of the Gospels has a similar structure. For each one the high point – the watershed of the Gospel as theologians call it – comes when Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of the living God. From this moment on Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and in each of the three Gospels the Transfiguration marks the start of the final journey. For us, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of us walking with Jesus, preparing to celebrate his death and rising again on Good Friday and Easter Day: and so, symbolically, the Transfiguration sets us off on our journey – as it did Jesus and his apostles.

So what can we learn from today's reading to take us into Lent? First, that prayer must be an important component of our keeping of Lent. Jesus had gone with Peter, James and John to pray, and it was while he was praying that God transfigured him. We want Lent to change us – in effect, to transfigure us - and so we begin with prayer. Next we see Jesus' clothes become shiny white – symbolic of his purity from sin. And for us Lent is very much about looking at our lives and seeing the sins we have allowed to creep into them, and turning away from them. We need to repent - remember that word from a few weeks ago - meaning to turn around and go another way. Really, doing this would be the greatest transfiguration of our lives.

Then we see Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus and they are reminding us that reading the Bible each day must be part of our Lenten discipline. If Moses and Elijah to the Bible seems an odd jump, look at it this way: Moses is there to represent the writing prophets from the Old Testament. He was

believed by the Jews of Jesus' day to have written the first five books of the Bible, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Whereas Elijah represents the speaking prophets – he is a central Old Testament figure but there is no 'Book of Elijah'. We only hear in other books what he said, did and will do – and the 'will do' is also relevant to the Transfiguration story. For the last verse of the last chapter of the Old Testament – Malachi – tells us "I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes".

Just as the written prophecies that Moses represented were fulfilled by the coming of Jesus, so the prophesied presence of Elijah confirms that Jesus is the Son of God, and the message to us is: Read your Bible each day in Lent, for God will use it to speak to you. Next we see Peter faffing around wanting to make shelters for Jesus and the two prophets. He really doesn't know what he ought to be doing, and this is a warning to us not to enter Lent unprepared. We need to decide upon a Lenten rule and discipline for ourselves. It may include giving something up, but more important is to set times for self-examination – leading to repentance. For prayer and quietness with God – so that we can hear Him speaking in our noisy busy lives. And for reading the Bible so that we can learn more of God and He can use His Word to speak to us. For we all have the experience of reading a familiar Bible passage and suddenly seeing a whole new meaning that speaks into our lives now, and indeed our Reading ends with God speaking, "this is my Son, whom I have chosen – listen to him" he said to the three apostles, and he says it to us as well. These words are first a call to faith in Jesus Christ – something else that we need to consider during our periods of reflection in Lent – for it is very easy for our faith to slip imperceptibly. The Devil just loves to draw us away subtly from Christ and he will use times of disappointment and disillusionment to pull us away from God's family – something I have seen over and over in pastoral ministry.

We need to use Lent to overcome anything that has weakened our faith, and listening to Jesus will help with this. We have already seen two ways in which we can listen: by keeping times of quietness within our prayers so that we listen as well as speak – and by reading the Bible, especially the Gospel

accounts of what Jesus said and did. And there is one other, perhaps surprising, way in which we can hear Jesus speaking, and this is through the words of fellow Christians. Most of the time our conversations are just that – simple conversations – but occasionally God will use us to say that our brother or sister needs to hear. We've probably all experienced it, and on numerous occasions people have said to me "do you remember that time you said so and so – it was just what I needed to hear". Usually I don't remember, but that was God using me to give His message. So these are the vital things that the Transfiguration is teaching us as we begin our journey through this Lent: pray, repent and read the Bible. And be attentive in every way to what Jesus may be saying to you.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

6.2.16