



newspringtime
COMMUNITY

18th February 2024

Commentary 2nd week of Lent B

A number of years ago I read a book by Maurice Bucke, entitled *Cosmic Consciousness*. It maintained that most of the world's great religious leaders had life transforming mystical experiences. For example, when St John of the Cross was enlightened by God during a time when he was in gaol, he was literally radiant as a result. One biography state that: "One night the man who was on guard went as usual to see that his prisoner was safe and witnessed the heavenly light with which his cell was flooded." Bucke suggested that something similar occurred following the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus. These were interrelated events, the one subjective and private, the other objective and public, when the light of Christ's inner illumination burst forth in the form of his external glory.

We are told that Moses, the archetypal lawgiver, and Elijah, the outstanding prophet of the Old Testament were talking to Jesus. Their differing contributions found fulfillment in the person of the Messiah. Then: "a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud" (Lk 9:34). This image has scriptural roots. It is a reminder of the time, on Mount Sinai, when God spoke to Moses from a cloud. It is also reminiscent of the occasions when Moses went into the tent of meeting. When it was overshadowed by the cloud of God's presence, he would converse with the Lord face to face (Cf. Ex 33:11).

Mystics have pointed out that, at first, the apostles could see and hear Christ. But as the experience deepened, a metaphorical cloud of unknowing enveloped them. As a result, although they could no longer see and hear Jesus, they knew in faith that he was present. Likewise, as Christians mature in the spiritual life, they are often weaned off ideas and images of the divine. Then they have to be content to let their wills, if not their minds and imaginations, to rest in the incomprehensible mystery of the One who "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16).

In the gospels we are told that a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." "You will notice that these were much the same words that were spoken when God addressed Jesus at his baptism. Now the disciples had first-hand knowledge of the fact that, although the Father was lavishing unimaginable love on his only begotten Son, he was destined, nevertheless, to suffer and die in Jerusalem. The preface of the Mass of the transfiguration explains succinctly: "He revealed his glory to the disciples to strengthen them for the scandal of the cross."

It is highly significant that the words, "listen to him," are the only recorded instance of the Father talking to humanity. It could be argued that such contemplative listening is the foundation of Christian spirituality. We can listen to the words of Jesus in a number of ways. He can speak to us through his teachings in the scriptures, through his inspirations and promptings in prayer, and through people, including those with prophetic gifts, who are inspired by his Holy Spirit. Such self-forgetful listening has a number of beneficial effects.

Firstly, as Jesus stated: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23).

Secondly, as St Paul declared, "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Rm 10:17).

Thirdly, the word of Jesus is effective, "It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is 55:11).

The transfiguration is a Trinitarian incident, the Father speaks; the Son hears; the Spirit is the shining cloud. Finally, there are intimations of the definitive coming of the kingdom at the end of time in the transfiguration. The fact that Christ's glory shone forth from a body like our own, shows that the Church, which is the body of Christ will one day share his glory.