

Sermon for 6 August 2017 at 9.30am (The Transfiguration)

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Two weeks ago, Phil and I travelled to Yorkshire to be with my younger brother, Richard, as he marked his last day of teaching at the school where he'd worked for 24 years. His decision to take voluntary redundancy had been a longish and very painful experience. He loves his pupils and has been a good teacher, but the rate of change in the profession and the increased bureaucracy had all taken its toll on his health. Finally, although he didn't want to go, he felt he couldn't stay. Rich is not known for being a "glass half full" person and so the whole process had been very gloomy, negative and difficult for us all. Phil and I weren't quite sure what to expect of the evening --- had hardly dared to mention the word "celebrate" --and the Friday evening traffic on the A1 did nothing to help our mood of trepidation.

What greeted us was almost unbelievable... a very cheerful, jovial chap, a little under the influence of alcohol it has to be said, but one who had quite enjoyed being thanked and fussed over all day. Colleagues and pupils had given cards and presents, but most moving of all, was a book of memoirs and testimonies written in by so many of the students he's taught over the years. Later, in the evening, more ex-pupils came to meet us in the pub and, as "Big Sis", I was introduced. So it was that I heard for myself that this lugubrious brother of mine, who never seems so happy as when he's miserable, was actually seen as a really cool dude, one with a sense of humour, who made learning tremendous fun and who had inspired so many youngsters to love his subject and to go on to further study of it. I was without words – I saw him glow in the presence of all these youngsters he cared about and I felt I knew him in a way I'd not known him before. It really was worth everything to have been there to share the moment with him.

Highs are always followed by lows and by the following Monday when I rang, things were back to normal and my long-suffering sister-in-law was again bearing the brunt of much grumpiness and negativity. Richard's "mountain top" experience was definitely over. But although he remains as ever he was, I have seen him in a new light and I won't forget that.

Our gospel reading this morning describes a very literal "mountain top" experience shared by the disciples Peter, John and James. They climbed alongside Jesus, with, I'm sure, no expectation of what was about to happen. Jesus knelt to pray, something they'd seen him do often before, but this time was different, for his face changed and his clothes became a dazzling white. He

was transfigured. Peter, James and John knew it was Jesus, but he was different. He wasn't transformed on the mountain that day, changing from some sort of cocoon into a glorious butterfly, full of light and beauty. That was for the Resurrection and that was why the disciples took so long to recognise him then. No, on this occasion, he was transfigured, revealed, as if a mask had been taken from his face and the disciples were granted a spiritual vision of who he really is; God the Father revealed in majesty and glory through His Son. It was a moment outside time, one of awe and wonder, something which uplifted them and yet frightened them. Coming down from the mountain, Jesus wasn't changed—he was still human and divine as he had always been. But Peter, James and John were changed because they had seen him in a new light.

Moses, whom Peter, James and John recognised as being with Moses at the Transfiguration, had his own mountain top experience of God. Hidden by clouds from both Moses and the Israelites, God spoke to Moses, listened to him and entrusted him to lead his people. He did not allow Moses to see his face in all its glory, but the contact was sufficient to bathe Moses' own face in reflected glory. Exodus tells us that his face was shining and that the people were afraid to approach him so that he needed to wear a veil. God's light was certainly reflected in Moses, but its brilliance was too much for the world to bear. Jesus believed that Peter, James and John were ready to bear the glory of what was to be revealed to them, and even though it left them feeling bewildered, it sustained them for the events to come.

What about us then? Are we ready for and open to Christ's transfiguration? In our life's journey of faith, we may have our own "mountaintop" experiences, those moments of extreme spiritual awareness when we glimpse the glory of God, or when we feel engulfed by his love and power. Because we are all different, God, of course, grants us these revelations in different ways. Many find their transfiguration moments in ordinary things—in the beauty of nature, in the smile of a much-loved grandchild or the soaring melodies of inspirational music. But there are also times when God appears to us in a glorious and visionary way. The extreme joy of these moments is indescribable, something which lives for ever in the memory, but which has a marked effect. Certainly we experience the pain of reality when we come down from the mountain and return to normality. But, because we have seen the power of God in our Lord Jesus, we have seen him in a new light. Such visions change us, because we are called to reflect the presence of Christ within us. And we're called to do that, not by becoming someone or something that we are not already, but by allowing the light of Christ that shines on us to reflect out from us into the world around.

For many Christians, certainly many within our church family, the Cursillo movement has proved to be a "mountain top" experience. At varying times

people have been nudged by a sponsor to go on a Cursillo weekend, perhaps not knowing what to expect or perhaps thinking they knew exactly what to expect. In any event, they make a decision to set aside some time to be with God – and how God uses the opportunity. Away from the demands of everyday life, and supported by fellow Christians and a huge network of prayer, a not insignificant number of participants, in precious and timeless moments, have been moved and changed by personal transfiguration experiences of God. They have seen God in a different light and although they remain the people they were, yet a change has occurred, one that demands a response, a growth in faith and a re-dedication of their lives to Christ. My Reader vocation bears testimony to that.

Cursillo does not work for everyone... and that's quite right. God loves our individuality, he loves us as we are and will find a way to each of us if we only allow him in, if we give him time. I wouldn't have seen my brother differently, if we hadn't bothered to make that trek to Yorkshire. The disciples would never have begun to understand the true nature of Christ if they'd stayed at the bottom of the mountain or if they'd given in to sleep. We need to do as God instructed them... "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." So through every day of our lives in Christ let us pursue our own transfiguration –all that we are and have been, but reflecting His glory. We pray that in time the world will see us in a new light, for the same light that showed the glory of Christ on the mountain will show the glory of Christ in our lives and the promise of the glory of Christ to the whole world.