

## **HOMILY – 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT – 12 MARCH 2017**

“Figure Skating” – is that something you are familiar with? Does it mean making shapes on the ice? The word ‘figure’ does figure in our daily lives more so than we possibly realise. There are derivations of it, such as ‘configure’, ‘disfigure’ and now today, Transfigure. We probably know what to disfigure means, to destroy or vandalise, like the disfigured face of Jesus on the cross. But what does ‘Transfigure’ mean?

It is a beautiful word with beautiful connotations, in a way it is trying to describe a remarkable visual experience that is really beyond words, beyond our vocabulary. This event, when Jesus was Transfigured on a mountain top, must have been truly mind spell-bounding, remarkable, so much so that it is recorded carefully in all four Gospels.

Jesus, the Son of God, is on the way to Jerusalem, to be crucified. He is with his chosen Apostles, Peter, James and John. He knows that they will be horrified in the near future by his passion and death. This is the moment to reveal to them that there is salvation beyond suffering. To give two important insights. Firstly, that he is the Son of God and the fulfilment of prophesy, hence the vision of Moses and Elijah, part of their ancient Jewish heritage. And secondly, to reveal to them what Christ will look like after the Resurrection. That what they see today is Jesus in a Transfigured state, as he will be in the room when he appears where the Apostles are hiding, grieving and afraid.

The truth is that disfigurement and death does indeed frighten us. It disturbs us to see the people we love growing old and frail, changing. Just as it troubles the Apostles to see Jesus being disfigured on his way to Calvary.

As recorded in the words of St Alphonsus Ligouri, who writes at the 6<sup>th</sup> Station, “My most beloved Jesus. Your face was beautiful before but in this journey it has lost all its beauty and wounds and blood have disfigured it. Alas! My soul also was once beautiful, when it received Your Grace in Baptism but I have disfigured it by my sins. You alone, my Redeemer, can restore it to its former beauty”.

The truth is that many lives are disfigured by violence, cruelty, persecution, abuse and poverty. Good people, through no fault of their own, are scarred by being used and the objects of greed and materialism. I think of the old miner I met in Kilsyth, years ago, who was blinded and made deaf by a mining disaster. What an affliction to be blind and deaf, as well as crippled with arthritis, digging for coal, thousands of feet underground.

Jesus wants to teach us in today’s Gospel, that no matter what the disfigurement of the tragedies and the hardships of this life, that every human life is sacred and valued. It is God’s intention to Transfigure, to change beyond all recognition the scarred lives of the faithful, that they may be like Him in Glory.

What stands between our sufferings and our Transfiguration of the Body and Soul, is the Cross of Christ. It is His Cross and Passion that changes our view of death forever. But Jesus does not want us to stop at the Cross of suffering and sacrifice. He wants us to go onto the Glory of the Resurrection. This, the Father, God, says to us “This is my Son the Beloved, He enjoys my favour, listen to Him”. It is very important that in our darkest moments of disfigurement, we also remember the Transfiguration of life by God. That we do not fail to listen to the teaching of Christ, triumphing over suffering, sin and death. True faith holds onto the promise of Christ.

As Cardinal Basil Hume said, in the last days before he died from cancer, "I had preached so often on the seven last words of Jesus from the Cross, now it was wonderful to find that they were such a part of me. The curtain (of death) was coming down but I wasn't worried because I knew what was beyond the curtain".

Jesus help me not to face death with denial but instead to be Transfigured in death, into eternity.

Amen