

Second Sunday of Lent, Year C

The responsorial psalm of today's mass is a beautiful prayer to pray when you find yourself struggling with fear. Only certain verses from the psalm have been selected, but the complete psalm (Psalm 27 in the Bible) speaks of various reasons why our heart may be afraid. It speaks of being a victim of violence (27:2-3). It speaks of being abandoned by one's parents (27:10). It speaks of being unjustly accused (27:12), and it recognises the fear that is caused by our own sins (27:9). The verses selected for today's Mass focus our attention, not on the causes of fear, but on the way in which we can find courage to overcome it.

We are reminded that the Lord is our light - the Lord whom we see transfigured in glory in today's gospel. He is our light because, as Saint Paul tells us in the Second Reading, he reveals the destiny to which we are all called. After our death, we are going to be glorified just like Jesus. He is with us on our journey and he will guide us along the way that leads to glory.

The psalm reminds us that he is our help and the stronghold of our life. What a powerful image! God is at the very centre of our lives. We can always find refuge there with God. The Gospel reminds us to listen to Jesus and the psalm reminds us to listen also to the cry arising from our heart. Our heart, troubled by fear, tells us to 'seek his face' (Psalm 27:8), knowing that he looks upon us with compassion and love. The final verse captures well the feeling of the prayer: 'I am sure I shall see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Hope in him, hold firm and take heart. Hope in the Lord' (27:13-14).

We are reminded of the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me' (John 14:1).

The most profound longing of our hearts is to be in intimate communion with God. When the apostles looked up they saw 'only Jesus'. To see Jesus is to see God. To enjoy communion with Jesus is to enjoy communion with God. This communion is expressed in all the ways in which we are privileged to love people, and God comes to us through all those who love us. But the readings today remind us that it is God who alone satisfies the longing in our hearts. As Saint Augustine says: 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you.' (Confessions 1.1) And Saint Teresa of Avila writes: 'Let nothing trouble you. Let nothing frighten you. Everything passes. God never changes. Patience obtains all. Whoever has God wants for nothing. God alone suffices.'

The point on which I would like to reflect with you this morning is that if our deepest longing is to gaze upon the face of God and enjoy eternal communion with him, and if the way to do this is to look up and see the face of Jesus, then this must be the ultimate desire of everyone, whether people realise it or not. And if this is true, then we must ask ourselves an important question. We come here to listen to God's word and to be drawn into the most intimate communion with God possible on earth in receiving Holy Communion. What are we doing as Catholics to go out to others and attract them to share this communion with us?

This is the very meaning of 'catholic'. We are not one among a variety of ways of being Christian. To be Christian is essentially to be 'catholic'. The word means 'universal', for the heart of God reaches out to all people, and so must the heart of a disciple of Jesus. To be catholic in the true

sense is to be committed to not belong to a sect, but to be open to all. Paul VI expressed this very well on the Feast of Pentecost 1966, when he announced the establishment of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians:

‘To take away from the Church its qualification of ‘catholic’ would mean to change its face, the face Christ wants and loves; it would mean to go against the intention of God who wanted to make the Church the expression of his unbounded love for mankind. We should understand the psychological and moral newness which this qualification implies ... The human heart is small; it is self-centred; it has place only for oneself and for a few others of one’s own family. And when, after long and arduous efforts, it opens up a little, we succeed in loving our own country and our own social class; but the human heart always seeks boundaries within which it limits itself and seeks refuge. Even today, the heart of modern man finds it hard to transcend this interior confinement. To the invitation of civil progress to widen its capacity for love of the world, it responds hesitantly and on the still self-centred condition that it be for its own advantage. Usefulness and prestige govern people’s hearts, not to speak of the drive to dominate others and to use them for our own purposes. But when the name ‘catholic’ becomes an interior reality, all egoism is overcome, all class struggle develops into full social solidarity, all nationalism is reconciled with the good of the world community, all racism is condemned, and all totalitarianism is unmasked in its inhumanity. The small heart has been broken open. It acquires a completely new capacity to expand. As Saint Augustine says: ‘Let the space for love be widened’.

Paul VI continues: ‘A catholic heart means a heart with universal dimensions: a heart that has overcome the basic narrowness that prevents us listening to our calling towards supreme love. It means a magnanimous heart, an ecumenical heart, a heart capable of embracing the whole world. This does not make it a heart that is indifferent to the truth of things or to sincerity of words. It does not mistake goodness for weakness, nor does it confuse peace with cowardice or apathy. It lives the marvellous synthesis of St. Paul: “Doing the truth in love”(Ephesians 4:15)’. If, then, we experience the privilege of communion with Jesus here in our community, our catholic heart will be compelled to reach out to others who experience the same longing, but who do not know where to look. However, it is important that when people look on the face of the Church, they see what the apostles saw at the Transfiguration. It is important that they see the glory of God shining there. It is important that when they look up they see ‘only Jesus’. Now there is a lot in each of us personally, and in our parish community, that cannot be said to be ‘only Jesus’. We carry with us our selfishness, our fear, our lack of faith and our prejudice. Which brings us to the purpose of Lent. We are human, we are sinful, we are struggling. We are asked to look at whatever in our life fails to reveal Jesus and to pray and work that it be purified away.

Let us help each other be open to grace so that we become more loving, more forgiving, more gentle, more compassionate, more humble, more transparently pure and welcoming. Let us help each other so that our heart be transformed into the Heart of Jesus, and that the face of our parish community become more and more clearly the face of Jesus. Then those who are hungry and lost and bewildered and lonely will be attracted to the communion of love for which their heart longs.