

Today is the final Sunday in the short season of Epiphany. So next Sunday will be in Lent. There'll be no more hallelujahs. We'll be wearing purple till Easter.

Epiphany is a word that means to reveal, to make manifest. It's traditional on this Sunday, the last Sunday before Lent, that the gospel reading is the story of the transfiguration that we just heard. It's in all three gospels, three of the four gospels. We heard the one from St. Mark. And it's a wonderful, if rather strange story, of Jesus going up the mountaintop and his nature, his true divine nature being revealed to these three disciples.

And as I attempt to explain what's happening in the story, I want to mention two words that St. Paul puts together in a sentence in the reading we had from the 2 Corinthians, our epistle reading. Two words that you might not necessarily expect to find in the same sentence. The first word is glory. We hear that word several times in our service today. I was counting, but I lost count at about seven or eight. We've already had it seven or eight times in today's service. It comes in the Collect with which we heard earlier on. It's in the Psalm, which describes God revealing himself in glory. It comes in the creed. It's actually not in the gospel reading for today. But when St. Luke tells this story of the transfiguration, he says that the disciples saw Jesus's glory.

Glory has an abundance of meanings. We've used it in several different ways when it's come up in the service. There's a certain type of glory that the 49ers and the Chiefs are playing for this afternoon. But we understand that only God is truly glorious. We relate glory to light. Just as in the gospel, Jesus's clothes we're told in this story were dazzlingly bright. God is the source of pure light. He is the one true divine, glorious light.

The other word that St. Paul uses in this sentence is face, which is actually something much easier to understand. We all know what a face is. In fact, we know to read faces very well because when we're babies, we spend a lot of time looking into other faces of adults who are looking intently at us saying things like, "Oh, he's got his dad's nose. Oh, he's got Auntie Beril's ears." We all study the face of a baby, and babies learn to read the face of the adults

gawping in their crib. We learn to read faces. We recognize them because they're very personal and individual.

I was in a museum last year and I realized I was standing next to someone who we were students together. I hadn't seen him for 40 years. Like all middle-aged men, he looked rather different. He'd gained a certain padding that goes with middle-age. But I recognized him straight away because of his face, even though his face had changed since we were young students together. Somehow, I knew it was him. I recognized him by his unique face. And he sees two words, glory and face, which St. Paul brings together at the end of that epistle reading. He writes this, "For it as the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'."

That's a deep and mysterious saying, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. St. Paul doesn't say the glory of God revealed in the sunrise or something that we might perhaps be more expecting. It's the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. That's very particular.

The knowledge of God comes in this unique historical face. It's particular and it's personal. What could be more personal and unique than a face? What the disciples were witnessing on the mountain was God revealing himself in human form. They got a glimpse of the wonder of the incarnation, God enfleshed. They got a glimpse of its true significance of what was going on, of Jesus's true divine nature, God making himself fully known in the person of Jesus.

When God chose to make himself known to reveal himself to humankind, he didn't write a letter, he didn't send a messenger. He came in the human form of Jesus Christ. He came as a person, a person with a unique face. Jesus says in John's gospel, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." That's an amazing thought. Christianity invites us to conceive of the ultimate in the form of a face.

The disciples witness this amazing revelation of God. They were granted a glimpse into its true nature. But sadly, as often, they didn't respond appropriately. They didn't know what to do. St. Peter wants to make

three dwellings, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He wants to capture the moment. I think if we were putting this story in a contemporary context, we'd say that St. Peter wanted to turn the transfiguration into an Instagrammable moment. He wanted to capture it for the gram, create a scene that would last. If you want to see this phenomenon in practice near here, you just go on the bluffs any weekend evening, you'll see three or four booths constructed there. And they'll have things like "Marry me" written on, people trying to capture that moment of proposal forever to get it on the Instagram.

Anyway, I digress, that's the prejudice of mine. How should St. Peter and the others respond to what they were seeing on the mountaintop? Actually, St. Paul answers that question in the previous chapter to the one I've been quoting. He writes this, "All of us seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

We are called to reflect God's glory. To use a technical term, we're to praise and glorify him forever. Peter should have done what St. Thomas did in the gospels. When St. Thomas, who came later to recognizing who Jesus was, when he had that moment of recognition, he fell on his knees, worshiped God, worshiped Jesus and said, "My Lord and my God." That was a fitting response. That's what St. Peter should have done at this moment of transfiguration.

Theologians talk about the dynamics of glory, and there's a flow of glory that moves abundantly within God, radiates from God and attracts everything into the fullness of that glory. We are called to be part of that dynamic, and we do that by praising God and giving glory to him. We glorify the one who is glorious. As the Westminster Confession puts it, the chief end of humankind is glorifying God and enjoying him forever.

I want to conclude by relating this to Lent, which begins this week. And I want to share with you a Lenten practice that I've spoken of before and I'm doing again. I want to learn the language of praise. The vision that's inspiring me is that if individually we learn to praise God better on our own during Lent,

how wondrous to come together on Sundays, to come together on Easter Day and praise God together for his glory. There's no better place to learn the language of praise than by looking at the Psalms in the middle of the Bible. Not all the Psalms are Psalms of praise, but many of them are. I've listed seven in the bulletin if you want to join me in this Lenten practice.

Top of the list is Psalm 145. There's seven Psalms because I thought, "Well, we could have one each day," but you could spend the whole of Lent and not get past Psalm 145. It's such a magnificent psalm because I'm not suggesting that we rush through these and just tick them off every day. "Oh, I've read this Psalm for today." I want us to read them slowly, to ponder them. The Collect says to inwardly digest what these Psalms say so that we might learn that language of praise, so that when we see God's glory revealed in a sunset, we'll say praise God, and we'll know what to say.

We're all brilliant at bringing our prayers of complaint and request to God. We don't need any further training in that regard. But we could all do with learning the language of praise, which is a key part of our spiritual and prayer lives, learning to praise God better. And the Psalms are a wonderful place to learn, to read those phrases, to chew on them, to make them our own so that we get that vocabulary to better praise and glorify God.

And if the goal of our life is where we are heading is seeing God face to face and joining with him and the angels in praise of God, why don't we start now getting ready? So, Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "Now we see, but a poor reflection is in a mirror, then we shall see face to face." Our hope is through the work of the Spirit in our lives, our lives will be changed and transformed, that we'll move from glory into glory, and that one day we will see God truly in all his glory face to face. If that's our end, if that's our goal, let's be ensuring that we are ready to start now, learning to praise the God who will be there in our midst now and at our end. That's our true end, to praise and glorify God forever. Amen.