

Could I begin by asking you a question?

What went through your mind as you read our Gospel passage, Mark's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus, either before the service or as it was read in the context of this service? For myself, whenever I read passages such as this, or the miracles of feeding or healing, I ask myself, 'What experience did the disciples have, what experience of Jesus lay behind, this account?' This is a question we have to ask ourselves whether we take these passages literally or see them as expressing in symbolic form their experience of Jesus as healer, as feeder, as Son of God.

The narrative itself is set on the top of a mountain, frequently in the scriptures a place of encounter, of revelation – we think of Moses on Sinai, of Elijah on Mount Horeb hearing the still small voice, of the Sermon on the Mount. The words out of the cloud, 'This is my son listen to him.' recall words spoken from the heavens in the accounts of Jesus' Baptism. In the vision of Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, this episode not only looks to the past but also looks forward to his coming passion and death. As I read over this passage a theme that seemed to run through it for me is that of insight, of understanding, of who this Jesus is.

And so transfiguration isn't just something that happens to Jesus, to which the disciples are simply passive observers; this is also something that happens to them. It is on this level of insight, of understanding, that this passage begins to speak to me.

There are those things can happen in life that cloud our vision. We can get side tracked, our priorities in life can get skewed to the detriment of other commitments and our own spiritual journey. It could be pressures of work, hobbies which are not bad in themselves as long as they are kept in their proper place in our overall lives and commitments – when that slips there is a skewing of our priorities to the detriment of ourselves and others. But I would go further than that. Particularly in these straightened times sheer worry, worry over ourselves, over those we love can simply weigh us down.

This past year has been like no other. This pandemic, that has paralysed societies across the globe, which has now gripped our country for a year, has traumatised our society in a way no other crisis has, not even the global financial crash of ten years ago. The programme on RTE this week on the Covid ICU unit in Tallaght University Hospital gave a vivid picture of what this virus has done to individuals, to families, the incredible strain it has placed on members of staff facing this day in and day out.

It has impacted on our economy. Businesses are left wondering will they ever reopen. Employees are left will they have a job to go back to, will their homes, will their families be secure, Then there is the long term impact on our education system, young people at crucial stages in their lives in limbo. Will there be exams or won't there, in the meantime staring at screens, trying to study, trying to stay motivated. All through this starved of interactions with friends, that we just took for granted when we were their age.

At times like this, we lose sight of the goodness of God, lose faith in God, faith in other people, and sometimes even faith in ourselves. What we all need at times like that are beacons, beacons of hope, of life, of love.

That is the darker side of things. Then there are those moments of insight, that can move us to worship, that can set us on a new direction. Times perhaps in our lives when we feel a real sense of the moment, when things fall into place – this is the person I love, this is the job that is really meant for me. This is the move I should make in my life. Moments also when God seems to break through. It might be in the course of an act of worship when the readings, the music, the prayers just seem to come together in a way that God seems real and close and personal.

What I have been talking about are the highs and lows of life, of faith, these moments of blindness, of insight. Are these highs and lows, these moments of insight and blindness simply to be the experience, the plight of the individual? This is where the image of the Church as the Body of Christ has a particular importance in our thinking. We are not just a group of isolated individuals, we are the Body of Christ with a commitment, a care for one another. Here to stand alongside one another, to embrace one another in our hurts and anxieties; just to be there, with one another, for one another. There to shine light into one another's darkness, to steady stumbling feet when the path is rough or uncertain – to be beacons of hope and light in the darkness and uncertainty of another's life.

Maybe, as members of the Church, the Body of Christ living and active in the world, that is our vocation, our particular calling at this time.

Called to be the ones in whom the light of Christ might shine in the lives of those who are struggling at this time, physically, mentally, spiritually.

The Christian Church has a major role to play in speaking into our national situation at this time in our history. Just as we as individuals are called to be beacons of light and hope in the life of another. The Church in our generation is called to be a beacon of light and hope in the life of our society, to be a voice of truth and integrity in the public place, to be a voice for those who have no voice in our society, those on the margins. To be the voice that says to our society, to those who have the power, who have the wealth, ‘This is my son, my beloved. Listen to him.’