Lectio Divina – 2nd Sunday of Lent - Year A

Contexts

Matthew’s Gospel (in brief)

* Composed between 80-90 CE
* Author is anonymous, but named as ‘Matthew the tax collector’ by later tradition.
* Written in scholarly ‘synagogue’ Greek.
* Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
* Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: “When Jesus had finished….”:
  + Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy, Baptism, Temptation
  + 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
  + 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
  + **3rd: 13 Parable Discourse**
  + 4th: 18 Community Discourse
  + 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
* May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
* Jesus first words are ‘to fulfil all righteousness’.
* A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
* 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
* The only Gospel to explicitly mention the ‘Church’ – Matthew is theologian of the church.
* Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
* Names Jesus as ‘Messiah’ at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 17:1-9: things to notice

* This episode comes just after Peter’s ‘confession of faith’ (16:13-20) and Jesus’ first prediction of the Passion and his teaching on discipleship (16:21-28).
* Jesus takes his ‘inner circle’ (Peter, James & John) up the mountain.
* Note the significance of ‘mountain’ as a place where God reveals himself in OT and Matthew’s casting of Jesus as the new Moses, who encountered God on the mountain.
* ‘Transfigured’ – to be shot-through-with light. Metamorphosis was a theme in much pagan literature which is probably why the Gospel writers don’t use that term.
* ‘Transfigured’; ‘his face shone like the sun and his clothes like the light’ – Light is deeply associated with the presence of God throughout the Old Testament. Note also that Moses’ face shone whenever he emerged from the Tent of Meeting – signalling the presence of God in the Tent.
* The completely transfigured Jesus (not just his face) signals the presence of God in him.
* His nature is revealed as light and is transparent to the disciples.
* Moses & Elijah appear – the 2 great symbols of the Torah (the teaching) and the Prophets (interpretation and action). The three are in conversation. Matthew again joins Jesus into the OT tradition and shows him at one with God’s saving action in history.
* Peter is moved to wonder by the experience and suggests making 3 tents – temporary dwelling places for people on a journey.
* Before he can do so, a cloud *full of light* appears. Another reference to the cloud of the presence of God in the Tent of Meeting and on the journey in the desert. It is the cloud of unknowing in which God is met and heard.
* From the cloud of light comes the voice: “As once the people of Israel were enjoined to listen to the Torah (represented by Moses) and to Prophecy (represented by Elijah) as its authentic proclamation and interpretation, so now they are ‘to listen to him’. (MO’B)
* The disciples are afraid and fall on their faces (a reaction to the command to listen, not to the vision itself – note: ‘when they HEARD this….’), but Jesus reassures them with words and touch – ‘Do not be afraid’ – the most frequently repeated saying of Jesus in the Gospels.
* When they look up Moses and Elijah have disappeared, leaving only Jesus. Only Jesus now, the living presence of God, is the Word of God.
* ‘Tell no one about the vision…’ – Note: a vision is an externalisation of an internal spiritual event, perhaps Peter’s insight into the role of Jesus. Who Jesus is will be fully revealed through his passion, death and resurrection.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The Sunday Lenten Gospels

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|  | First Reading | Second Reading | Gospel |
| 1st Sunday | Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7  Creation & Fall | Romans 5:12-19  Sin and Grace | Mt 4:1-11  Temptations |
| **2nd Sunday** | **Genesis 12:1-4**  **The call of Abraham** | **2 Timothy 1:8-10**  **Our call to holiness** | **Mt 17:1-9**  **Transfiguration** |
| 3rd Sunday | Exodus 17:3-7  Israel’s water of despair | Romans 5:1-2, 5-8  God’s love poured into us | John 4:5-42  Samaritan Woman  [Living Water] |
| 4th Sunday | 1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13  Anointing of David | Ephesians 5:8-14  Children of the Light | John 9:1-41  Man born blind  [Light] |
| 5th Sunday | Ezekiel 37:12-14  I will put my spirit in you | Romans 8:8-11  The Spirit dwells in you | John 11:1-45  Raising of Lazarus  [Life] |
| Passion | Isaiah 50:4-7  I did not cover my face against insult | Philippians 2:6-11  He humbled himself and God raised him up | Matthew 26:14-27:66  Passion |
| Easter | Acts 10:34, 37-43  We ate and drank with him | Colossians 3:1-4  Look for the things that are above | John 20:1-9  Jesus risen from the dead |

The Gospel of the Transfiguration completes the ‘little parable’ which begins Lent. The Gospels of the first two Sundays describe what Lent is about and what Christian life is about: a constant journey from temptation and doubt to transfiguration and faith; a journey away from allowing ourselves to be tempted to evil and towards allowing ourselves to be tempted to good by the action of God’s Holy Spirit within us.

Transfiguration means to be ‘shot-through’ with the presence of God. Being transfigured is about allowing the presence of God to completely transform us; it is a revolution of mind and heart driven by God’s Spirit and enabled by our open heartedness.

That’s what our life as Christians is about: being transfigured by the Spirit of God so that God is seen in, and experienced through, us. Just as Peter, James and John glimpsed the Spirit within Jesus at his transfiguration and many in the Gospels experienced the healing touch of Jesus.

The journey to transfiguration requires faith and perseverance. The first reading tells the story of the covenant God makes with Abraham. It is a story of great faith and trust: Abraham’s faith in God, and God’s faith in Abraham. What God was promising Abraham must have seemed fantastic to him, yet he trusts in God’s word, leaves everything that was important to him behind and sets out on God’s journey.

It takes faith and perseverance to dare to allow ourselves to be tempted by the passion, hope and vision of God rather than our own desires and wants. It takes great faith to trust in God’s word to us. But if we do, the living word of the ‘Beloved Son’ forms in us the heart of God and we become transfigured by God’s love alive in us.