

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Reflection – Sunday next before Lent – 27th February 2022

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Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. Luke 9.30 &31.

I feel these are very appropriate words for the Sunday before the beginning of Lent, which descends on us this coming Wednesday. I hope they will also help us in our reflections and prayers following the dreadful events in the Ukraine this week.

But, as seems to be a bit of a habit with me, may I first indulge in a moment of nostalgia!

As some may remember, the three Sundays before Ash Wednesday, had interesting and majestic names: Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and today, Quinquagesima. These names were introduced in Rome in the seventh century, and were retained by Cranmer in the Book of Common Prayer, which many of us probably grew up with. Sadly these intriguing titles have no place in Common Worship. They were probably introduced to encourage a long term view or focus on Easter. Unfortunately Septuagesima, and Sexagesima were wrong calculations, but today is accurately the fiftieth day before Easter. As a theological student, this was a comforting day, as it meant only fifty days to the end of term. But of course we needed to get through Lent first.

By contrast Common Worship names them the Sundays before Lent: the focus has been moved back from Easter to Lent. We need to remember that Lent is primarily a preparation for celebrating the resurrection. It helps us to explore the meaning of the resurrection in our living out the Christian life. It encourages us to rise to a new life.

So today, here on the Sunday before Lent, what are we looking forward to? We may no longer have the three majestic titles for the Sundays before Lent, but on this day, in all three years of our liturgical calendar, we have the grand event of the Transfiguration. What can be more majestic than the account of an experience of the glory of God?

Today's Old Testament reading tells of how Moses' countenance was so changed after his experience of the glory of God that he had to cover his face when in public view. Saint Paul takes this up in our New Testament reading, talking of a symbolic veil that prevented his fellow Jews from seeing the truth of Christ. *Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. (2 Corinthians 3.14).* Perhaps, in the same way we often need to unveil our thoughts, hearts and minds to see the ways of God, even to become aware of his glory.

Some may say, that in the light of this week's tragic events, 'Glory' is something that should be put on the back plate for the time being. But when we lose sight of the glory of God, we are in danger of losing all sight of hope. It's perhaps a fortuitous choice that as we move towards Easter, this year's Lent groups will be discussing Teresa White's *Hope and the Nearness of God*. We should note that at the very moment of Jesus' Transfiguration in this morning's gospel, Moses and Elijah foreshadow the forthcoming tragic events: *They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. (vs 31).* From this point on the gospel story moves steadily forward to Good Friday.

The Gospel reading concluded with what seems to be an unrelated event; an encounter with a man and his highly-deranged son. The disciples can do nothing to help - this seems to be an absolutely hopeless situation. But into their darkness, Jesus brings a moment of glory. *Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God. Luke 9. 42b & 43.* Here we can read the glory of God.

When he went up the mountain to pray, Jesus took with him his three closest disciples, Peter, John and James. And, just like Moses, *while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed. Luke 9.29.* Prayer is the starting point where we can begin to experience and understand the glory of God. Lent gives us the focus we need to spend more time in prayer, so that when, on Easter morning, we sing

that wonderful hymn, *Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won*, we have a fuller understanding of the glory of God present in the Risen Lord in our own lives.

The current dire situation very much needs this. Without confidence in the glory of God there can be no hope, and hope is not only essential in the present crisis, but also in the many other critical situations ruining so many lives throughout the world today: the hungry and homeless, the poor, refugees and those deprived of their human rights and dignity. All need our prayers, all need the hope of God's glory. Today in our liturgical and private prayers we especially hold the present calamity before God, but we do so in the knowledge that his glory will prevail in the end. Unless we believe this there can be no hope. In this or any other perilous situation we may not even see our way through, but our faith calls us to put our trust in God. We must pray that he will guide us and all involved to find the way forward to his ultimate glory.

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

Amen.