

**Sunday before Lent – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2017**  
**St Stephen's**

**Revd John McGrath**

**Readings: 2 Peter: 1:16-21 & Matthew 17:1-9**

Our readings from both the second letter of Peter and Matthew's Gospel refer to the Transfiguration of Jesus. I believe what the Scriptures say about the transfiguration. There are some clergy who, for whatever reason, think it was a myth. Why do some people doubt the transfiguration I wonder? Is it because they cannot believe in any miracle? If so, why don't they resign from Holy Orders and be a social worker or something. When I was ordained I was given a Bible and the Bishop said take authority to preach God's word. That is what you will always get from me. I preach God's word not human opinion.

Peter stresses that he, James and John were eyewitnesses to what happened. 'We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his Majesty. We ourselves heard this voice from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.' Our collect reminds us that the transfiguration happened before our Lord's suffering and death upon the cross. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked the disciples, 'Who do you say that I am?' And Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' After that revelation by the Father to Peter Jesus knew it was time to head for Jerusalem where he would be crucified. Our Gospel speaks of the Lord being transfigured. The three disciples who knew Jesus as their human leader and rabbi had a revelation of his divine nature and glory. They also heard the voice of God the Father saying, 'This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him'. We pray in the collect, 'Give us grace to perceive his glory that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory'. What I want to focus on today is not the truth about the transfiguration of Jesus, but the possibility of our own transfiguration, our being changed from glory to glory. Having no doubt about the transfiguration of Jesus I want to say how we can be transfigured ourselves, and reveal the divine nature within us. The divine nature has been given to us by God through our faith in Jesus. It was before he was crucified that Jesus was transfigured. For us though it is the reverse. We have to crucify ourselves so as to reveal the divine nature which we have received by God's grace.

We have to know the truth about ourselves because self knowledge and scrutinising our own nature is for the good of our soul. As we approach Lent that is what I want you to think about. A discipline of self-control is necessary to become more like Jesus. In baptism we die to self and are raised to new life in Christ. Although baptism happens once, the struggle of the spirit with the flesh is ongoing till the day we die. Our struggle with sin and our passions leads to self mastery and then to our transformation as we become more clear about God's nature and our own.

2 Peter 1,16 following is our reading for today but earlier in the chapter Peter writes about God's plans for us. Verses 3-5 say this: His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through the years he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge and to knowledge self-control and to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness... One of my favourite topics is that Christians are not only human but that we share in the divine nature through our faith and our baptism into Christ. The Greek Orthodox Church calls this participation in the divine nature Theosis.

We know that we are all sinners and also know that God alone is good. But thank the Lord there is yet another truth of which we can be certain. Know that God is in you. Just in case you think this is a Greek lesson or a very deep theological teaching, let me give you an everyday example to illustrate what I mean. On a hot day you may open the windows in a room. If you say that you air a room it means that you bring air into the room not that you make the room air. Theosis is to bring God into the person not to make that person God. So we are not God, but God is in us. That is what makes us Christians. Our Christian discipleship is a process of transfiguration as we are being changed from glory to glory. Our Lenten discipline should be based on that truth. We are to be truly penitent, repenting of our sins, getting rid of anything that is bad in us. Lent is not about giving up chocolate but giving up sinning. Don't take up something different each Lent, but always take up your cross to crucify the self. Above all else this Lent, pray to be continually filled with the Holy

Spirit, the divine person who lives in you and makes you more than only human. Live up to your high calling as a Christian. Amen.