

THE EMMAUS SERIES

2nd Sunday of Lent, Year C

Genesis 15: 5-12, 17-18

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 9: 28-36

They were speaking of the passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem

Each year of the three-year cycle, the gospel of the second Sunday of Lent tells of the Transfiguration. This year we have Luke's account. Luke's presents this incident as Jesus instructs his disciples - preparing them for his journey to Jerusalem to meet his fate. The liturgical tradition echoes this outlook, inviting us to learn the lessons of this mysterious incident as we begin our journey of Lent. In Luke's account, in the verses immediately preceding, Jesus has warned the apostles of what lies ahead: 'The Son of Man will be rejected and put to death'; more than that, everyone who wants to be his follower 'must take up his cross every day and follow him' (9:22-23). Luke's account clearly has these warnings in mind. It is filled with reassurance for the chosen followers Jesus has brought up the mountain with him. Moses and Elijah (representing the Law and the Prophets, the great bearers of old Israel's hopes) are conversing with Jesus concerning 'his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem' (the destiny of Israel was established in the original Passover and Exodus; in what lies ahead, this great destiny is to reach its final moment - as the shadows of the old order give way to the reality they prefigure, the Paschal Mystery). From the 'cloud', so often a symbol of God's presence in the first Exodus, the voice of the Father confirms what Jesus has told them of this new Passover: 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.'

As he tells the story of Jesus, Luke often emphasises the place of prayer in our Christian life. The Transfiguration took place in a moment of prayer; Jesus had taken the chosen apostles 'up the mountain to pray'. There he communed with the eternal Father, readying himself for the mission he was soon to accomplish for the life of the world. As we make the journey of Lent, this example of his – making himself truly our brother and companion – should inspire us to make the journey with him, eager to give ourselves more fully to that personal mission to which the eternal Father has called us – in our families, our parish community and the broader world.

Paul's exhortation to the Philippians is along these lines. The Easter celebration we look forward to reminds us of our final 'homeland'; to share in all that lies in store for us, we will be transformed by the power through which our Saviour brought the whole universe into existence. The rationale of the Liturgy's choice of Old Testament passages during Lent is different from that of the Sundays of the year – chosen because they chime in with the theme of the gospel. The Paschal Mystery is the final climax of God's saving interventions. Each Sunday in Lent, therefore, a great event of God's saving history is recalled, reminding us of the one great story told in the Scriptures. Today it is the Lord's promise to Abraham, made according to a strange old ritual whereby earthly rulers confirmed their commitment to their subjects by oath.

John Thornhill sm