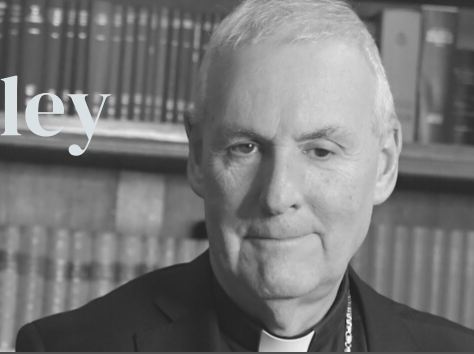




Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton



Letter for the Second Sunday of Lent 2024

25 February 2024

To my dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today we hear an account of the Transfiguration. We always listen to this Gospel moment on the Second Sunday of Lent. The Transfiguration is full of Old Testament images. God revealed himself to his chosen ones on high mountains. There the prophets were unable to look at his face. When Elijah encounters God, not in earthquake or fire, but in a still small breeze, he wraps his face in his mantle (cf 1 Kings 19.13). People who meet with God in the Bible are generally filled with awe and even fear.

All of this, and more, is present in today's Gospel. The message is very clear. The apostles are meeting with the living God when they encounter Jesus. And then those words of our heavenly Father, spoken from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him.' Jesus speaks to his disciples about what lies ahead when they reach Jerusalem. He will be crucified. Not something the disciples could imagine. He will rise again on the third day. Not something the disciples could understand.

As we listen to the Gospel of the Transfiguration this Sunday, how may we live this moment in our own lives? We may wish to commit ourselves to regular times of prayer. We can become so caught up with what we want to do for God, we struggle to simply rest before the Lord and listen carefully to what our Lord may be sharing with us. In our busy schedules, how is the season of Lent going? Are we finding ourselves caught up in the demands of daily life and struggling to find time to meet with the Lord in prayer?

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, when we pray, we should go into our room and close the door. We may want to take these words literally. But a great Carmelite saint, Edith Stein sees the "room" in this teaching as our heart. And what are we closing the door of our heart to? All the noise and chatter around us. I remember someone telling me last year, he had decided during Lent, not to listen to the radio between 8.00pm and 8.00am. It was a way to keep his heart a little more quiet and still.

Maybe there is something of the apostle Peter in many of us. We want to do something for the Lord. After all, there is so much to do! During these days of spiritual conversation around our Diocese, with all the decisions we must make in the coming years, it's easy for us to begin all this with a quick prayer and then move on to the main business as we see things.

Perhaps we need a radical change of mind. To my mind, none of our conversation will be of the Lord, unless we make time and space for the Holy Spirit to come amongst us, saturate us with the desire for Jesus, for holiness. 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'

Sincerely,

Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton