

Gospel text

Matthew 17: 1-9

1 And six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and his brother John with him, and led them up on a high mountain. 2 Now he appeared differently before their eyes, his face was as radiant as the sun, his clothes became white as light. 3 At this time they also experienced the presence of Moses and Elijah speaking with him. 4 Reacting to all this Peter said to Jesus, "Master, this is a place where it would be good for us to stay. If you don't mind, I am setting up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and another for Elijah". 5 He had not finished speaking, that a large dazzling cloud covered them with his shadow, and out of this cloud came a voice which said, "This is my son whom I love, he is my bliss. Pay attention to what he says". 6 Hearing this, the disciples threw themselves on the ground, hiding their faces, in great fear. 7 But Jesus approached them and touched them, saying, "Get up and stop being afraid". When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus who was all alone.

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Do not tell anyone about your vision until the new Adam has been raised from the world of the dead."

Gospel commentary - Homily

The mystery of Jesus is also ours

Are you introverted or extroverted? If you are introverted, you may be found a little secret, people will feel they do not know you very much. If you are an extrovert, people may have the feeling that they know who you are, because you are very open and outspoken. However, it is quite possible that in both cases people know you poorly, they take your social mask for your real and deep being. There is more. We don't know you well, because first you don't know yourself well.

It is indeed revelation and knowledge of identity that is involved in the Gospel of this Sunday. But beware! We are used to having our eyes focused on Jesus transfigured, while it is the disciples who are at the heart of the story. They are the ones who live an extraordinary experience, who discover a different Jesus, who perceive in Jesus the very mystery of God at work, as it was at work in Moses and Elijah. It is so true that it is the disciples who are shaken, afraid of what they discover. Even if this scene could not have existed without the experience of Easter, the existential phenomenon remains the same.

I tried to draw from my experience examples of strong moments, privileged moments of discovery, either of others, or of myself. They are rather rare. Because it is more than these beautiful pleasant moments in the company of a loved one around a good bottle of wine, even if these moments can be an invitation to enter into the density of things and to say like Peter: let's keep forever these moments, let us build tents so that they remain among us.

The day I realized that I was in love and that my being wanted to enter a new life project, I experienced a moment of light and liberation, but at the same time I shivered with my whole being, frightened at the unknown and all that it involved. When a couple in permanent conflict discovers at the end of therapy that they are called to different paths, there follows both a moment of liberation and extreme fear at the consequences and the unknown. I know a mother who was confronted very early with the mental deficiency of her daughter: to accept it, or to refuse it as it was the case for her spouse, such was the stake. But the discovery and acceptance that she was called to unconditional love was both liberating and frightening at the thought of what it meant for the rest of her life.

Do you think we are far from the story of the transfiguration? Not at all. By discovering the mystery of Jesus, it is the mystery of their own life that they discover. It is incredible and marvelous: what a moment of light to perceive your life so closely linked to this Being who is the source of the world and of all love. But at the same time, they are frightened at their collapsing universe and so many unknown that are forthcoming. This is exactly what we can experience in these moments of rare truth.

I have one more question. Why do these moments of truth very often occur in times of suffering and trial? In the Gospel narrative, it is in the shadow of the announcement of Jesus' imminent arrest and his death that this intense moment is experienced. Why did some people need September 11 and the sight of all these thousands of case files floating in the air like snowflakes to suddenly see themselves differently? Why did it take this event to hear this beating life from Afghanistan? Why does it sometimes take the loss of a loved one to undertake this long journey of self-discovery? Why is it sometimes necessary that parents open painfully to the announcement that their child is homosexual to experience afterwards a true exchange with their child and the rediscovery of their beauty.

What the disciples experienced, we are called as well to experience on different levels. But for that, you have to accept to be "taken to the mountain", "out of the way". The meaning of these last words varies from person to person. And what's more, we have no control over these moments. This Lenten season reminds us that life is a journey of which we do not fully grasp the contours. But we can keep an open heart, and pray to Jesus who preceded us on this road, so that, during these moments of great truth, we have the strength to live them and not to flee for fear.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, December 2001