

Homily: 2 Lent B – Faith and Sight

All of us are familiar with the phrase: “*Seeing is believing*”.

Yet these days we are expected to have a fair amount of trust in the normal course of events.

Our society is very complex. Many of the things we use are too complicated for us to understand fully. Many skills – be they professional or manual - are highly advanced.

So to get through any day we have to put our trust in a technology or a system that is obscure to us – which we can't fix when it goes wrong;

or in an organisation that is hidden from us – like how fresh and varied food from all over the world is available for us to pick up from the supermarket shelves;

or in people who have become expert in particular fields – medical, technical, and others.

And we do place our trust - with considerable confidence - in things and in people - until the day when our trust is shaken by something going wrong, by not living up to our expectations, or by circumstances which bring things to a halt, or by some tragedy like a fatal accident.

Nonetheless, it is not long before our faith rises up again, perhaps a little shaken indeed, but we realise our trust is required for life to go on.

Although having faith is so much part of everyday life still people question its reasonableness when that faith is to do with religious matters – such as placing our trust in the person and promises of Jesus.

Such religious faith is, of course, a gift of God, for which we should pray. But it is also a response from within our own heart to God's love revealed in Jesus.

When things are going well in our life perhaps we do not find it too difficult to believe Jesus words, and try to imitate his actions. We are glad to be counted among his friends and followers. We find comfort in spending time in His presence.

But when things seem to go all wrong, when trials come, when darkness falls, when pain of heart or body afflicts us – then it is much harder for us to believe His promises, and to trust his Gospel way. We need to see some signs that our faith is not misplaced.

If we see evidence that the Gospel works, that our present experiences have some meaning, and that eventually our future is bright – then it is easier for us to believe.

To experience something of God's loving presence is a reassurance, an encouragement that can sustain us in the times when all seems dark and empty.

The three apostles are blessed with such an experience on Mount Tabor. They see their Master transfigured in glory. In this vision they glimpse also their own destiny as human beings set free from sin and lifted up into God's life.

It is an experience they find quite overwhelming. They are hard put to describe it, or to know how to react.

But its purpose is clear: to sustain them in the time of trial which is soon to come when the Lord will be put to death, and when they will find themselves apparently alone and bereft and in peril.

Maybe we will never have such a transcendent, mystical experience as that of Peter, James and John.

But we are all called upon to share to some degree in our Lord's crucifixion, and if our share is to be great then perhaps we may well have glimpses of his loving presence in our life to sustain us.

In fact, many people can and do tell of such religious experiences that opened their eyes to the hidden reality of God's love, which changed their whole way of life, which gave them courage to face their trials and bear their tribulations.

Many more of us can be touched and heartened by less dramatic manifestations of God's presence and power at work in our lives:

What parent has not wondered at the miracle of birth?

How many of us have been startled by the wisdom and insight of a child, or by the generous impulse of a young person who goes against the self-interested spirit of the age to give themselves in service to those in need?

Some of us are moved by the enduring religious faith of someone who has suffered greatly, or who has been bereaved of a loved one, or who has been afflicted with chronic ill health.

The Requiem Mass for a true believer is often a time when others who have had little or no connection with the life of the Church find comfort and strength, and when they can be impressed at the disposition of those who have been bereaved yet remain calm and controlled.

Often we can be amazed at the courage of those who daily contend with the evil of social injustices or political oppression.

Every day we can meet people who remain of positive disposition in the face of great hardship.

We seem to have things so easy in comparison, and yet our faith is so fragile!

It is right for us to pray that our weak faith may be made stronger by the grace of God.

It is also right to expect that our faith will be bolstered by the witness of others whose faith is deeper than our own – and it is a good reason to come together in church to offer each other encouragement and spiritual strength.

But it is also important to remember that faith grows stronger, like muscles, by being **exercised**.

And if it is true that 'seeing is believing' it is also true that *some things have to be believed to be seen*.

So let us put our trust in the promises of Jesus, and try our best to live by them so as to glimpse their truth in the here and now.

And let us look forward to experiencing the fulfilment of his promises in that place that to which he has gone on before us to prepare for all who are his faithful disciples.

Then we will hear ourselves saying with all our hearts, as Peter did, *Lord it is wonderful for us to be here!*