

FROM GLORY TO GLORY

2 CORINTHIANS 3: 12-4:2

Glory is not a word we use very often these days. It is mostly confined to a natural phenomenon like a sunset or sunrise. If something really takes us aback we might exclaim that it is glorious. In Biblical times it is usually confined to describing something related to the divine. When Isaiah gets a glimpse of heavenly splendour it is “glorious” or when speaking of God as being God is often described so. If you use the word, what are you most likely to be referring to?

In both Old and New Testament Readings today we see it used in quite different contexts. These differences show us how the transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant works. How things change from a specific, historical situation to the more spiritualised general situation of today.

In Exodus Moses had spent 40 days on top of Mt Sinai speaking with God. He comes down to the people with the 10 Commandments on 2 tablets of stone. We read that he shone with glory. Which we presume was some kind of glow or light surrounding his head. The people were afraid to look at him because they believed it was because he had been in the presence of God and if they looked upon it they would die. So Moses placed a veil over his head and after a time the glory faded. The purpose of the veil was twofold: it stopped the people from being afraid to look at Moses and it also prevented them from seeing the glory fading away.

Paul explains that the veil is still present in the life of the Jewish people as it prevents them from seeing Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law. The veil keeps them in the dark and prevents them from understanding the Law in the way Jesus interpreted it and showed how it pointed to the coming Messiah – which was he. Paul tells the Corinthians, “even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.” (3:17-17)

The purpose of the Law was to show Israel how to live as God’s people. The Law itself did not bring life – that came from their relationship with God. The Law actually brought death because it highlighted their sin as and when they disobeyed. The Spirit brings life because it convicts us of sin and urges us to turn to Christ. Just before our passage for today Paul writes, “for the written code kills but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor.3:6) The glory Moses had faded but the glory that comes from Spirit never fades away.

In the Gospel story of the Transfiguration Peter, James and John catch a glimpse of the glory that was like Moses’ glory and that was enough to want them to stay on the mount forever. But Jesus would have none of that. When they opened their eyes they saw Jesus only. They no longer needed the Law or the Prophets (represented by Moses and Elijah) any more. Jesus would show them God. Jesus would bring salvation. Jesus would bring a glory that would never disperse.

What does that mean for us? I am suggesting that the story of the Transfiguration has a wider, deeper meaning than we can imagine and that it will require all the faith we can muster to believe it.

Corinth was a very difficult Church. I would never have contemplated accepting a Call there. The Church was beset with all sorts of problems. Problems arising from Jewish Christians – insisting on Circumcision, even for adult converts and an insistence on obedience to the Jewish Law, to problems from Gentile Christians- still visiting the pagan Temple, issues of divorce, sex before marriage etc. Paul says he wrote this second letter “with tears”. Yet Paul doesn’t give up on them. In Verse 18 of Chapter 3 he writes, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

This problem Church at least has had the veil lifted and is receiving God’s glory through the Spirit who is at work amongst them. In other words Paul is convinced that even with all their problems they still belong to Christ who it still at work transforming them into His likeness.

Think of what has happened this week. Do we think that is happening within the Catholic Church? Is it being changed from one degree of glory to another? St. Paul would say, “Yes”. How many faithful Catholics both Priest and Lay have said how perplexed, saddened, disappointed and angry they are at Cardinal Pell. Listening to the radio. Many have said that their faith in the Church has not been shaken but they realise that men – even Cardinals – do the wrong thing. In the debates about supporting same sex marriage the Uniting Church was accused, still is, of abandoning the Bible and turning its back on hundreds of years of tradition and accepted practice. The Assembly still thought it was the right thing to do. On the South Coast of NSW a large proportion of the Anglican congregation was outraged when the Rector allowed a woman to preach. They said they would leave if it ever happened again. Is that church being changed? Paul would say “Yes”.

This is why Jesus said, “Judge not lest ye be judged”. God’s Spirit will determine how and when the Church will change. God’s Spirit will determine under what circumstances that glory will be come about. God’s Spirit will work in and through the Church, even though he sometimes might have to work in spite of it. My task, our task, is to recognise that we are to ask God’s Spirit to guide us. As we are fed by Word and Sacrament we ask to become more discerning, to acquire more wisdom in making decisions that advance the mission of Christ in this place. We may not understand why various thing happen in other places. We never know all the circumstances, the paths they have had to tread. Our task is believe as the Apostle believed that in the most troublesome places God’s glory still shines forth.

Our task is become a community where we encourage God’s spirit to work freely among us. This is true transfiguration – to show God’s glory in our hearts and lives. AMEN
