Sunday 6 August – The Transfiguration of the Lord

Scripture: Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14; Psalm 96; 2 Peter 1: 16-19; Matthew 17: 1-9

*Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.*

There were times when Jesus spent time with crowds – and times with a smaller group of disciples – times with the Twelve – and, occasionally with this small group of three who seem to have been particularly close to him. We do not know why they were chosen but would guess that Jesus felt comfortable with them – that he could relax and be himself. Of course, in today’s gospel, Jesus being “himself” is very, very different from the Jesus who has walked the paths of Galilee with them up until now. Suddenly, they see the glory that is within Jesus and, understandably, are afraid. But Jesus, as so often throughout the bible, comes to them and tells them not to be afraid but to store the experience up for when it will finally begin to make sense.

* Who are the people you can relax and be yourself with?
* When have you had an experience that has only made sense sometime later?

Spend some time today thinking about what it was like for those three friends of Jesus to see this totally different side of him. You might like to allow the story to play out in your imagination – and put yourself on top of the mountain to watch and listen as the events unfold.

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Monday 7 August – (Ss Sixtus and Companions or St Cajetan)

Scripture: Numbers 11: 4-15; Psalm 80; Matthew 14: 13-21

*When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.*

Yesterday, we saw Jesus go up a mountain with a few close friends. Today, we see two other sides of Jesus. When he hears about the death of John, he takes himself off to a place where he can be alone- a place where he can grieve and pray. When the crowds hear the news, they go in search of the one John had pointed out to them. Jesus must have been weary and full of sorrow but, seeing the crowd, he does not go deeper into the wilderness but sees their need for leadership and comfort – and comes among them to love and to heal.

* When have you felt the need to withdraw to a place where you can be by yourself?
* When have you had to put your own needs to one side in order to serve others?

Reflect today on the human need for solitude at times – and the need sometimes to put your own needs to one side in order to care for others. Look back at times in your own life – to times of seeking solitude and times of showing compassion to others.

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Tuesday 8 August (St Dominic)

Scripture: Numbers 12: 1-13; Psalm 50; Matthew 14: 22-36

*When Peter noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’’*

Quite how Peter had failed to notice the strong wind before is not clear – Matthew clearly states that the wind was against them. What is clear is that, when Jesus invites him to walk towards him, Peter at first feels no fear. Presumably, his eyes are fixed on his Lord – but there comes a moment when the reality of being in the middle of the lake in a storm – walking on the water… and that reality fills him with fear – and he sinks. What is interesting is that Jesus does not hesitate but, when Peter calls for help, immediately helps him to safety.

* Why do you think Peter lost the sense of the wind and rain and lake as he started his walk on the water?
* How might this story apply to you on your own faith journey?

Spend some time thinking about this episode in Peter’s life – responding eagerly and confidently to Jesus’ call – to fear – to rescue – and to a deeper sense of faith in Jesus. Reflect a while on how this might mirror things that have happened in your own story and growth in faith.

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Wednesday 9 August – St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

Scripture: Hosea 2: 16, 17, 21-22; Psalm 44; Matthew 25: 1-13

*At midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. (and when) the bridegroom came, those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.*

Edith Stein was born into a practising Jewish family in Germany at the end of the 19th century but, having read St Teresa of Avila’s autobiography, converted to Catholicism and, eventually, became a Carmelite like Teresa. As a nun, she developed her love of learning but Germany was becoming a dangerous place for Jews – including those who had converted to Christianity. The Carmelites moved Teresa Benedicta to the Netherlands for safety but, following a Dutch Bishops’ Conference declaration condemning Nazi racism, she was caught up in the retaliation against people of Jewish origin. She was arrested and killed on 9 August 1942.

* How does the life of St Teresa Benedicta reflect the story of the wise and foolish bridesmaids?
* What might have helped Edith/St Teresa Benedicta prepare for the fate that awaited her?

Give some time today to reflection on the reality of racism – and how it enables ordinary people to do cruel and inhumane things. Pray for those caught up in any kind of racism and deep prejudice – and for those who are victims of what this leads them to do and to say.

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Thursday 10 August – St Lawrence, Deacon

Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 9: 6-10; Psalm 111; John 12: 24-26

*Jesus said, ‘Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.’*

St Lawrence was one of many martyrs who were executed in August 258AD. On 7 August, we had the memorial of St Sixtus (a Pope) and his Companions who died as part of the same persecution. Constantine had a basilica built in honour of Lawrence whose feast was (and is) celebrated with greater prominence that Sixtus – which is interesting to note. No one knows why this should be so but it is clear that something about Lawrence’s life and death impressed people of the time to such an extent that he was remembered with particular affection and respect while the persecution continued and then greatly honoured when Christianity came out into the open.

* What does it say that the martyrdom of a deacon seems to rank higher than that of a pope?
* Why do you think the early martyrs have such an honourable place in the story of Christianity?

Give some time today to praying for those who are persecuted for their faith today. Ask for the intercession of St Lawrence – and others – as people who have been in that situation – who have suffered and died for the faith we share.

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Friday 7 August (St Clare)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4: 32-40; Psalm 76; Matthew 16: 24-28

*Jesus said, ‘What will it profit them if they gain the whole world but ruins their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?’*

We sometimes hear of people who have given enormous amounts of energy to gaining wealth and status – but, ultimately, finding their lives empty and unfulfilled. They may respond by trying even harder – convinced that, if they just have that bit more, they will find the happiness they are yearning for. Some respond by giving it all up – or most of it – and taking a new direction, often in areas such as the arts. Still others, look at their wealth and set up foundations and trusts to try to ensure that the money is used to bring good to others who have not had their advantages and opportunities. Few of us are in that position, of course – but our attitude to prestige and wealth can still hold a strong influence over our lives.

* What is your own attitude to wealth and status?
* What can be lost when people gain more than they can personally use or enjoy?

Spend a few minutes today thinking about the power of wealth to give life – and to take it away. Pray for those who have great wealth – that they may be wise stewards of their riches and remember that one day, they will have to leave it all behind.

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Saturday 12 August (St Jane Frances de Chantal)

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6: 4-13; Psalm 17; Matthew 17: 14-20

*Jesus said, ‘If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there”, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’’*

As far as is known, no-one in the history of Christianity has ever moved a mountain by faith alone. If truth be told, Jesus did not move a mountain either! If we read the whole gospel for today, we could sense that Jesus is in a bad mood. He has called the people around him a perverse and foolish lot and wondered just how much longer he is going to have to put up with them. It is clear that the statement about mustard seeds and mountains is coming from the same feelings. It reminds us of the human side of Jesus – that he knew just how it felt to be tired and stressed and, just occasionally, needing to vent.

* How do you feel about a Jesus who can get tired and stressed and frustrated?
* What would you have wanted to do or say if you had been there?

Spend time reflecting on the humanity of Jesus – and how he felt all the pressures and stresses and strains of everyday life – and those that came with his powerful ministry. You might like to share your own frustrations and concerns with the One who knows just how you feel!

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