

I expect that many of you will have noticed that both our bible readings are about people being transformed - changed in preparation of great work in the service of our Lord.

In our reading from Exodus we have the story of the Jewish people being saved from slavery in Egypt and led towards a promised land - in this account Moses has just received the 10 Commandments which God has written on the two tablets of Stone.

When Moses comes down from Mount Sinai, his face was radiant - shining, even glowing after the time that he spent with God.

After this account we get details of the way that the Jewish people should worship as they travel through the wilderness towards their promised land - One important feature was the building of the Tabernacle the tent of Meeting which they were put up every time they stopped on their Journey through the desert. God also gave them a cloud to lead them by day and a fire in the cloud by night.

I often find it amazing that given all these wonders - the tablets of the commandments - the shining face of Moses and the cloud by day and the fire by night - after all this the Jewish people would still stray from the path that God had set before them - it's amazing that they strayed to worship other Gods some of whom were man-made.

A Mountain is also involved in our Gospel account of Jesus - Jesus with Peter, James and John, go up the mountain to pray. Like Moses the face of Jesus changes as do his clothing - they are said to be "as bright as a flash of lightning" - And Jesus meets Moses and Elijah - Moses the great leader who had led his people out of Egypt - Moses who had himself been transfigured as seen in our first reading.

Then there was Elijah one of the Great Jewish prophets who it was thought would appear when the new Saviour - the Messiah - the Christ - would appear.

The account continues with the cloud - reminding us of the cloud of God in our Exodus reading. Jesus, Moses and Elijah go into the cloud and God's voice comes from the cloud saying, "This is my Son,, whom I have chosen. Listen to him."

Luke has highlighted, throughout this passage, the way in which the transfiguration was preparing Jesus - preparing him not just for one human tragedy but for the greatest test of all.

Moses and Elijah, says Luke, were speaking with Jesus "about his departure", which he was going to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem'.

The word for 'departure' is *exodus*, and Luke means us to understand that in several senses. It can mean, like 'exodus' in the Old Testament, 'departure,' 'going away'.

It can also serve as a gentle way of saying 'death,' as when, for example, someone says 'when I am no longer here', referring to their own death.

But the reason Luke has chosen this word "departure"- not least in connection with Moses! – is that in his death Jesus will enact an event just like the great **Exodus** from Egypt, only more so.

In the first Exodus, Moses led the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt and home to the promised land.

In the new Exodus, Jesus will lead all God's people out of the slavery of sin and death, and home to their promised inheritance - the new creation in which the whole world will be redeemed. God's people will, in the end be taken into a great new Life that will never end.

Jesus himself, then, went through the mountain-top experience, knowing that it was preparing him to follow where the law and the prophets (here represented by Moses and Elijah) had pointed: but back down in the valley, Jesus would have to go to the place of despair and death, the place where Jesus the **son of man** would be handed over to sinners in the shape of the High Priests of the Temple and the Roman Governor – Pontius Pilate.

The disciples were overwhelmed by the transfiguration, and blurted out things they didn't mean.

Peter seems to have thought it would be good to keep Moses, Elijah and Jesus there for ever – but things don't work like that). They were unable to understand how it was that the glory which they had glimpsed on the mountain, the glory of God's chosen son, would finally be unveiled on a very different hill, an ugly little hill outside Jerusalem. And this Jesus would be revealed as the Servant who was carrying in himself the promise of redemption – of saving the whole world.

We, too, often find it completely bewildering to know how to understand all that God is doing and saying, both in our times of great joy and our times of great sadness.

But the word that comes to us, leading us on to follow Jesus even when we haven't a clue what's going on, is the word of God that came from the cloud on that strange day in Galilee:

'This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.'

And now for something completely different !

Today is St. Valentine's day and it all goes back to Priest in Roman times. The Roman Emperor Claudius the second needed more soldiers – the trouble was that as soon as men got married they wanted to stay at home and not go abroad fighting wars. Claudius's answer was to ban marriage. I suspect that he wasn't the most popular man in Rome at the time !

Valentine was a kind-hearted priest who wanted to help – So secretly he married as many couples as he could – then the Emperor found out, put him in prison and sentenced him to death.

While he was awaiting execution, Valentine showed Christian love and compassion to everyone around him. His jailer had a young daughter who was blind, but through Valentine's prayers she was healed. Just before his death in Rome on February 14th, Valentine wrote her a farewell message and signed it "from your Valentine".

So the first Valentine was about love - but Christian love from a Priest about to die to a little girl who had been healed by prayers.

Moses led the Jewish People out of Egypt inspired by God's love for his people.

Jesus was transfigured and was prepared to Die for us on the cross so that our inheritance of Eternal life might be assured.

And Valentine was prepared to risk his own life so that couples could be married and showed God's love to the little blind girl.

And both our reading remind us that there is one constant thing in our lives – when all around us changes – It is certain that God loves us.

As you leave this service I want each one of you to take with you a card – It's a Valentine's card which reminds you that "God loves you".

Amen.