

**Reflection on the Gospel-Second Sunday of Lent Year A
(Matthew 17:1-9)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Last week's gospel invited us into a confronting habitat, namely the wilderness. This week, we follow Jesus and three of his companions to a mountain and eventually a cloud-covered mountain. Both wilderness and mountain link Matthew's story of Jesus with the story of the Israelites of old. Wilderness and mountain also remind us that God's creation is the locus of wonder and mystery. The world we inhabit has an integrity of its own that has not always been acknowledged in our tradition. It is, in a very real sense, God's dwelling place. It is, in addition, the place of human-divine encounter and the place of human encounter with the other-than-human material world. Attention to habitat can lead us to a clearer understanding of our own place in the scheme of things and to ever deeper understandings of our relationship with God

The "transfiguration" seems to point to a time in Jesus' ministry when he comes to terms with the fate he is likely to meet: if he confronts the forces of oppression and injustice, he is certain to encounter opposition, even death. Jesus struggles with that realisation in the wilderness at the outset of his ministry. On the mountain top, he comes to terms with what that involves. The disciples see Moses and Elijah, the key prophetic figures of Israel, speaking with Jesus, God's new and definitive prophet. Peter wants to hold on to the experience of glory, to "make tents" for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He prefers not to face the difficulties involved in fidelity to a mission that elicits hostility. That is not, however, the way of discipleship. Rather, Peter and his companions are called to "listen" to Jesus, the beloved of God, as are all who follow in the way of discipleship.

Matthew's account of the "transfiguration" is followed by a reminder that Jesus is soon to meet a violent death (17:23). Jesus' companions get a glimpse of God's glory shining on his face and penetrating even his clothing, a hint that God's grace is more life-giving than the forces of violence that oppose God's reign. Like Jesus and his companions, we too need the occasional glimpse of final victory. We need the good sense to listen and to follow through on the path that brings life, despite the pain. We can feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges facing us and by the opposition we experience from the most unexpected quarters. If we are to sustain the struggle for a healthy, safe, and peace-filled world, we have to resist the temptation to hold on to the moments of glory, and come to terms with the personal cost of being faithful to the gospel mission of justice and compassion with all its painful demands.