

Reflection on the Gospel-2nd Sunday of Lent Year B
(Mark 9:2-10)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The wilderness was the geographical and key symbolic focus of last week's gospel story. This week, the focus is a mountain. Wilderness and mountain remind us that God's Earth itself is the locus of mystery and grace, the place of Earth-divine encounter. The mountain, like the wilderness, links Mark's story of Jesus with the story of the Israelites. Moses' encounter with God on the mountain of Sinai was a defining moment in the life of the people: the Israelites entered into covenant with God at this mountain and received the Law that was to guide their lives as a people. Some centuries later, at a time of crisis in Israel's life, the prophet Elijah returned to this mountain and experienced the presence of God in the gentle breeze.

In the gospel passage for today, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain and is "transfigured" before them and "his clothes become dazzling white". In the Book of Revelation, white clothes come to symbolise the clothing of martyrs, of those who die for their faith. Elijah and Moses, the key prophetic figures of Israel, appear and enter into dialogue with Jesus, God's definitive prophet. The "transfiguration" seems to point to a time in Jesus' ministry when he accepts his likely fate. If he continues to challenge oppression and injustice, he is certain to encounter opposition, even death. He struggles with that realisation in the "wilderness" and comes to terms with what it involves on this unidentified mountain.

The voice of God reaffirms the identity of Jesus that was announced in the opening words of the gospel and proclaimed at his baptism in the Jordan. It calls for a response from the disciples who have ascended the mountain in his company: "Listen to him". In the two preceding scenes, Jesus has spoken of the suffering that he and his followers will have to face. These words are crucial to an understanding, not only of Jesus, but of what it means to follow him. They fall on deaf ears.

Peter wants to hold on to the experience of glory, to "make tents" and settle down. He prefers not to face the difficulties involved in fidelity to the mission. But that is not the way of discipleship. Like Jesus and his companions, we too need the occasional glimpse of final victory. We also need the courage and the good sense to return from the mountain and 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 sometimes experience. Vaccines for Covid-19 are in process of changing our world. They have a crucial role to play in combatting infection, in casting out fear and restoring life. We too have a role to play. We must "listen" to the underlying causes of disease and come to terms with the costs involved in maintaining the struggle for a sustainable, safe, and peace-filled world.