

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

His Exodus

I really think our translators might leave that word *exodus* in our Bibles on this day, when we read the Transfiguration story with our faces turned towards the city of Jerusalem, and the paschal mystery. *Moses and Elijah...were speaking with him about his Exodus, which he would accomplish in Jerusalem.* It's usually translated as *passing*, and it would be just as easy to translate it *passover*; I've seen *departure* (banal) and *decease* (just plain obtuse). I feel sure that Luke intends us to think of the whole mystery by which Jesus goes to the Father, the sacrificial path he follows to save the whole people.

Hints and Shadows

I'm always impressed, above all in Luke, by the shadowy presence, in today's Gospel, of the Garden of Gethsemane. Here are Peter, James, and John, taken away from the other nine apostles, just as they will be on the night of the agony; again the atmosphere of prayer, again the hillside. The scene here is glorious, where that of Gethsemane will be traumatic; yet in both places *the eyes of the disciples are heavy with sleep.* Here they stay awake and see his glory and the two who stood with him. *His glory* is a paschal reality: James and John ask in Mark's Gospel for *places at your right hand and your left, in your glory*; it is the Cross that Jesus means, when he says *these places have been allotted by the Father.*

Stay Awake

The injunction to stay conscious and aware reminds us of that constant refrain in John's Last Supper discourse, where Jesus keeps saying *Remain in my love, keep my commandments, remain part of the vine...* to stay faithful, to remain, not *beside*, but *in* Jesus, is the mark of the Christian. The scattering of the disciples at the Passion is symbolic of their being spiritually outsiders, close perhaps, but not truly *in Christ*. Here is a meditation for us that is truly Lenten; we don't pass through Lent as newcomers, after all, or as the first disciples did; we are heirs to two millennia of following this Way, and it seems meretricious to pretend we're inventing it. By our Baptism, above all by the indwelling Spirit, we are members of Christ, and it is *in Christ* that we journey to Calvary, suffer the encounter with sin and death, and lie in the grave. We don't look down on the original disciples pityingly, from the

loftiness of our holiness. But we recognise our privilege of inheriting, not the unsighted state in which they met the Cross, but the knowledge of the risen Lord which they eventually bequeathed to us. Our Lenten road, therefore, is different from their fearful following, and must be lit by the light of Easter.

Was It Real?

There is a very real question about the Transfiguration: if it *really* happened when the Gospels say, how did Peter, James and John lose faith so easily when the Passion came? I think the question directs us to a real Lenten self-examination. We encounter the Cross of Christ whenever we accept the interpretation it offers of our suffering, our incapacity for life. Like Peter, James and John, we usually cop out, escaping the closeness of ultimate realities – life and death. Our receiving of the Gospel of the Resurrection does not have its proper effect in us. We waste time in being petulant, resentful, fearful, as if we had been told nothing of the truth Christ suffered to give us. So we too readily forsake the vision which ought to liberate us from the power of these negative facts. Because we do not want to look on death, we escape into the nearest convenient bolt-hole. Lent is the time to refuse the escape-hatches we find so useful, and to *remain in Christ* who resolutely goes on to meet his destiny, and the Father's will. If we have imitated him in his dying, we shall also imitate him in rising from the dead.
Fr Philip