

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Silence of the Lambs

The apostles kept silence and, at that time, told no-one what they had seen and heard. I always find this an extraordinary and significant moment. These men have in some way glimpsed the reality of Jesus - and the effect is to *silence* them. Surely we would expect them to come up shouting, to publish what they have experienced, like some ghastly tele-evangelist. Instead, a kind of reserve settles on them and - in Luke - we have to deal with the special fact that Jesus did not ask this of them. Mark has Jesus *warn* them not to speak; Matthew has Jesus *command* them to be silent. But here they do it instinctively - they know they do not have the power to tell the truth they have glimpsed.

Silence in the Garden

We can't help noticing that the special apostles of the Transfiguration and those of the Agony in the Garden are the same - Peter, James, and John. In both places they are taken on one side for a special experience not granted to others. It is also worth noting that, in the Agony story the three of them *fall asleep* - and here too we are told *they were heavy with sleep*, so that Luke is consciously trying to create a link between the two stories. In this story, they stay awake and see his glory; in the garden story they fall asleep and fail to see his agony. Are we to conclude that his glory and his agony are facets of one reality? I think so. And much of the rest of the Gospel seems to say the same. Our categories are so restricted by our small understanding that we ourselves fall asleep on the job of trying to grasp the full meaning of Christ. We are always doing what Peter did - thinking like a man, not like God. We run the risk of imposing our smallness of mind on Jesus. If we did that we would not only make dark the light of the world, we would also find ourselves worshipping a very false little God. The silence of the three apostles in the garden of Gethsemane is that suspicious one which is eventually disturbed by a mild

snoring. Their silence before the tremendous mystery on the mountain-top is quite different: a silence before too much light has nothing about it of stupidity or insensibility; there is a rightness about the silence of awe. But the silence of Gethsemane is the silence of weakness, the prelude to the running-away which will be the contribution of the disciples to the Passion.

We Saw His Glory

The Transfiguration is something we celebrate in its own right in August, the season of bright lights, of falling asleep in the heat of the day. In this Lenten encounter with the story, there is something specific to be learned. The Preface speaks of Jesus *preparing his disciples for the coming Passion*. The unspeakable realities of that drama are the subject of his discourse with Moses and Elijah - the Law and the Prophets. Then we remember that it is Luke who gives us that journey at the end of the Gospel, where a third traveller teaches the two disciples how the books of Moses and the Prophets were speaking about the death of Jesus, and the hearts of his listeners are set aflame with the story, in which agony and glory are made one. *Fr Philip*