

## Readings for the Feast of the Transfiguration

4<sup>th</sup> August 2024

### First Reading: Daniel 7:9-10,13-14

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened.

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

### Second Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-19

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

### Gospel: St Luke 9:28b-36

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' Peter did not know what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

## A Reflection for the Feast of the Transfiguration

'I asked God to show my heart. This is my heart. I couldn't have done more.'

These words were said by the swimmer, Adam Peaty, last Sunday evening in an interview, just after he had come second, by the smallest of margins, in the 100m breaststroke final at the Paris Olympics. Peaty has been at the forefront of British swimming for a decade, having won gold in this event 3 years ago in Tokyo and 8 years ago in Rio. But an injury after the Tokyo Games led to severe bouts of depression and a battle with alcoholism. It was a conversation with a chaplain that led him to faith and a new perspective in life, ... and a return to swimming. In the interview he spoke of a hard journey, but also of feeling in his heart that he had won because he had given his all, and he gave the glory to God. It was a generous and inspiring interview. Faith has changed him, and I think he would say in a positive way.

Today, we are keeping the Feast of the Transfiguration, which falls on Tuesday. Transfiguration means to be changed in form or appearance, usually, as my dictionary puts it, for the better. On this day we remember the occasion when Jesus' outward appearance was transformed on the mountain top so that the disciples witnessed his divine glory. For the disciples, frightening as it was, it was a moment of revelation of Jesus' divinity that would sustain them through the dark and difficult times that lay ahead. Similarly, in our Old Testament reading, we read part of Daniel's vision in which he saw the glory of heaven, the Ancient One on the throne, and the 'one like a human being' who was given dominion, glory and kingship, whom all people would serve. It is also a vision that gave hope to God's people in times of darkness, that ultimately God's kingdom will be established.

As one of the disciples present on the mountain, Peter, later wrote in his letter, the transfiguration of Jesus was no myth, no idle story, they were eyewitnesses of what had happened. And, as he went on to say, we should pay attention to their testimony. The transfiguration is like a lamp shining in the darkness until the day dawns. It is a revelation that will sustain and guide us and all Christ's followers until the day Jesus returns.

But transfiguration is not only about a vision of Jesus' divinity, it is also about how we are transfigured, how we are changed for the better, by our relationship with God. In today's collect prayer is the phrase: 'mercifully grant us such a vision of his divine majesty, that, being purified and strengthened by your grace, we may be transformed into his likeness, from glory to glory.'

In his interview, Adam Peaty spoke of the sacrifices he has had to make in many ways, to be the best he can be, not only using his gift as a swimmer, but also as a father and as a human being. Sacrifice is a word we often associate with our Christian faith. At times, there are sacrifices we are called upon to make to be the best we can be, to do what God would have us do.

Peaty brought to mind another great Olympian, the 'Flying Scotsman', Eric Liddell, whose success at the Paris Olympics in 1924 was immortalised in the film *Chariots of Fire*. As one article I read put it, Liddell 'lived his faith without compromise'. He sacrificed the opportunity to compete in the Olympic 100m sprint, his best event, because the heats were on a Sunday. It made him hero for some, but he was condemned by others for a lack of patriotism only few years after end of the First World War. So he competed in the 400m instead. Before the final, he was handed a piece of paper, on which was written "In the old book it says 'he that honours me, I will honour'" He went on to win the gold medal.

So the Feast of the Transfiguration is about a vision of Jesus' divinity, and the strength that gives us, and it is also about how we are transformed into Jesus' likeness. But there is a third component, and that is how we transfigure the world around us.

There are far too many examples of how humanity has changed the world for the worse: war, climate change, acts of mindless violence such as we have seen this week, the hostility and denigration of others that characterises much of politics, and wider society through social media. It can seem as if, every time we take one step forward, it is followed by several back. But it's not all negative there are also positives, and today I want to focus on those. Transfiguration is about changing for the better.

Eric Liddell said "We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel them from Christ." The article I read about him said that he was not some joyless puritan whose faith was defined by what he refused to do. Those who knew him described him as funny, humble and approachable. After the Paris Olympics of 1924, Liddell could have basked in his popularity and success, but a year later he returned to China as a missionary, working in a profoundly deprived area. He was interned in 1943 when that area was invaded by the Japanese. In the prisoner of war camp, he was renowned for sharing everything, organising games, teaching and Bible classes. He died there early in 1945. A fellow prisoner said of him, "He was overflowing with good humour and love for life, and with enthusiasm and charm. It is rare indeed that a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known."

As the commentator interviewing Adam Peaty last Sunday evening noted, his attitude is powerful for the rest of the team and sets the tone for what it is to be an Olympian. But more than that, he is also a powerful role model for all of us of what it means to give of one's best as a human being, and to do so with humility, giving the glory to God.

I came across another inspiring Olympics -related story this week. Not someone who is well-known but someone who has had a huge impact on the success of others. Her name is Vicky Tolfrey, and she was interviewed on *The Life Scientific* on Radio 4. She is the Director of the Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport at Loughborough University and has dedicated her life to finding scientific and technological solutions for para-athletes, solutions that make their sporting dreams a reality. She has worked with stars from the worlds of wheelchair athletics, basketball, rugby and tennis, amongst others, many of whom will compete at the Paralympic Games in Paris later in the month.

These people have all helped to transfigure the world around them; their generosity, positivity and humility have helped others to feel better. We are not all Olympians, but we can all have an Olympic Spirit that enables us to use our experience of the love and grace of God to play our part. Our attitudes, the way we treat others, how we use the gifts we have been given matter. As Eric Liddell said, 'we are all missionaries'.

As the body of Christ, we are transformed through our worship, prayer and sharing of the Eucharist together in order to go out and be a blessing to the world. So, let us seize the opportunities God gives us to do that. Like Adam Peaty, we can ask God to show our hearts to the world, showing the world who we really are in God, living out that image of Christ in us.