

Readings for the Sunday before Lent

2nd March 2025

First Reading: Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Gospel: St Luke 9:28-43

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.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him.

I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God. Everyone was amazed at what he was doing.

A Reflection for the Sunday before Lent

from Rev'd David Higgon

There have been some Sunday mornings when I drive to church, when the sky is clear and the sun is shining, and as I come down the road from Dundonnell to Braemore and see the Fannaich mountains before me, that a little bit of me yearns to be on the mountains rather than coming to church. It reminds me of something the Scottish naturalist John Muir once said: *'I'd rather be in the mountains thinking about God, than in church thinking about mountains'*. I don't spend all my time in church thinking about mountains, but I do think about them a lot because each morning I awake to a view of a great Scottish mountain, An Teallach. An Teallach is a great mountain to look at, but it is even better to see the view from its top.

It is very hard not to think about God when on a mountain, especially when on a sunny day the glory of God's creation seems to shine all around you. But my thoughts have also turned to God when it isn't a beautiful day, when the weather turns for the worst and the rain snow and mists descend, and you pray to God to get you off the mountain alive!

There's lots about mountains in the bible. God used mountain-tops to speak to the prophets Moses and Elijah as he also spoke to Jesus on the mountain in our gospel reading today. For Moses, Elijah and Jesus their encounter with God on the mountain was the precursor to testing times that lay ahead. Recently in our Bible Study group we have read about God and Moses having a conversation on a mountain, where Moses attempts to placate God who is outraged at the behaviour of the Israelites who have made a statue of a golden calf to worship when they think that God is absent. Elijah enjoyed his moment of triumph on Mount Carmel, when God used Israel's great prophet to silence those who followed the false god Baal. However, right after this amazing feat, Queen Jezebel threatened him, and Elijah, loses heart and flees into the wilderness. Jesus's transfiguration on the mountain, his encounter with his Father, was preparation for the arduous journey that was to follow, his journey to the cross at Golgotha.

Our own mountain-top experiences can also strengthen our faith for the challenges that are to come. But you don't have to climb An Teallach or any other mountain, to have a mountain top experience, The truth is that God is present everywhere.

I want to read you a prayer from the Gaelic tradition. It was collected from near here in Wester Ross:

Urnigh Èirigh - Prayer at Rising

Bless to me, O God,

Each thing my eyes see;

Bless to me, O God,

Each sound my ear hears;

Bless to me, O God,

Each odour that goes to my nostrils;

Bless to me, O God,

Each taste that goes to my lips;

Each note that goes to my song,

Each ray that guides my way,

Each lure that seeks by will,

The zeal that seeks my living soul,

The Three that seek my heart,

The zeal that seeks my living soul,

The Three that seek my heart.

The prayer makes no distinction between the spiritual and the material, and no distinction between our outward senses and our inward desires. It seeks God's blessing on everything we see, hear, smell, touch, taste and on each note that goes to our song. To each thing that we desire, each thing that tempts us. The prayer reminds us not only that we can encounter God anywhere, but that God actively seeks out our living souls, seeks out our hearts, in the mundane things of our everyday lives as well as on mountain tops.

Sometimes it is hard for us to see that the splendor of God is reflected not only in the natural world, but in our relationships and encounters with people in our everyday life. On the mountain Peter and James and John caught a glimpse of the splendor of God' in Jesus as he stands transfigured, with a shining face and dazzling clothes. Can it be for us too that in human faces God's glory can be revealed to us today – in every face around us? We may reflect on the importance of shining a little joy into the lives of those whom we may encounter today and each day and to consider how we in turn might see something of Jesus Christ in the faces of the people we meet. Does every face reflect the glory of God, how can we read other people's faces?

Let me share with you some very deep and very profound thoughts from a writer who seemed to have an expert ability to read people's faces and who wrote about the impact of ugly thoughts and good thoughts on our faces. I'm obviously talking about Roald Dahl. In his book *The Twits* he said this.

'The funny thing is that Mrs Twit wasn't born ugly.

She'd had quite a nice face when she was young.

The ugliness had grown upon her year by year as she got older.

Why would that happen? I'll tell you why.

If a person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, every year, the face gets uglier and uglier until it gets so ugly you can hardly bear to look at it.

A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts they will shine out of your face like sunbeams, and you will always look lovely’.

I wonder how people read our faces.

We all may have 'special places' for holy encounters with God, but we don't really have to climb a mountain, we can meet God anywhere in the ordinary mundane things of life. In each thing our eyes see, each sound our ears hear, each smell that goes to our nostrils, each taste that goes to our lips, each note that goes to our song, each ray that guides our way. We encounter something of God in those who bring joy to our world and who genuinely touch our lives. Those who make us smile and make us feel the world is a cheerful place. Loving laughter is a gift of God and so are words sincerely spoken – they too are a reflection of God's loving presence in our midst.