

Our readings today on this final Sunday before Lent have been pointing us towards what happened at the transfiguration. Where in the story, Jesus takes three of his disciples--Peter, James and John--with him up onto a "high mountain," where his appearance dramatically changes, i.e., he is "transfigured" before them. Jesus is then said to have been joined by Moses and Elijah, and then a voice comes from heaven-- God's voice--and says, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

Now the author of the passage from the second letter of Peter which we've heard this evening appeals to this event, which the author uses it is suggested as a part of a sustained argument with a group of people to which he refers as being "false teachers" (2:1).

But before we look at the false teachers, it is good just to reflect briefly upon the authorship and genre of 2 Peter. This letter it is suggested appears to fall in the genre of a "testament," i.e., which was a common genre of Jewish literature in which the purported author is presented as being near in some way to death and through the testament gives a final message to his people. Now these final messages usually included ethical exhortation and predictions of things that were to happen in the future.

However, testaments such as these were also often written under an assumed name and probably understood by their

readers as exercises in historical imagination in which words are put into the mouth of some now-dead famous historical figure. As a testament, then the second letter of Peter was probably it is argued by many was actually written a few decades after the death of Peter in order to bring the message of Peter to bear on a situation of false teaching that arose during those decades. So the unknown author is using the much respected and elevated name of Peter to convey a significant aspect of prediction for the future to counteract what they saw as false teaching.

Now the false teachers referred to in our reading appear to have been teaching that the belief in the eschatological coming (the *Parousia*) of Jesus Christ was a "cleverly devised myth" (1:16) which it would be good to discard. Their reasoning it is argued seems to have been that Jesus' return was expected during the lifetimes of the first Christian generation. Since by their time this generation had died without seeing the *Parousia*, this expectation must have been false.

From the perspective of the author of 2 Peter, this throwing to one side of the expectation of the *Parousia* (and its related expectation--eschatological judgment) is of great concern. In a passage later on in chapter two of the letter the author criticizes strongly the false teachers for being corrupt and sinful and even deceiving others into joining them in their corruption.

But why does the author of 2 Peter refer to the event of the transfiguration? Well it is said that his appeal to the Transfiguration is an attempt to in some way root and ground the eschatological expectations of the church in the eyewitness (as well as ear-witness) experience of those who were actually present at the Transfiguration. They saw Jesus "receive honour and glory from God" that day, and they heard the authoritative voice from heaven: "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." Now for many the Transfiguration is understood as a foretaste of the *Parousia*, when the Son will come again, in the same glory and honour that infused the Transfigured Jesus, with salvation and judgment.

But the author of 2 Peter goes much further than this in that he maintains that the eschatological hopes of Christians have profound ethical consequences. In other words, the expectation of Christ's return makes (or ought to make) a difference in the day to day lives of those of us who expect it. That difference of course should be reflected in how we live. Our lives ought then according to the author of the 2nd letter of Peter to be characterized by things as are listed earlier on in the letter such as faith, goodness, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection and love (1:5-7). So from the author of the 2nd letter of Peter's perspective the expectation of eschatological judgment, which the transfiguration is said

to prefigure, ought then to provoke in us to try to live lives characterized by godliness and holiness (3:11).

Now on this final Sunday before Lent we look forward just a little to the time that is given to us to reflect upon the nature of our lives and our discipleship of Christ. The expectations that come in and through the resurrection of the Jesus, which of course is an eschatological event if ever there was one, is one which may have ethical consequences for us during the Lenten season which we are just about to embark upon. One way we might do that is to reflect upon where we might place ourselves on the mountainside.

For the more contemplative amongst us, the writings of Thomas Merton might help us to form such a reflection upon our life as a journey and in his seminal work called *Seven storey mountain*, he almost gives to us as Christian disciples a route into how we might ascend into a more closer relationship with God but as Merton himself questions, when he reflects upon his journey towards God

How far have I to go to find You (God) in Whom I have already arrived.

So the author of 2 Peter grounds the expectation of the eschatological return of Christ in the real life experience of Peter, James and John at the transfiguration. Now that expectation is understood in turn as having significant daily behavioural consequences. Consequently, the passage that we've heard tonight can serve as a good archway through which to enter our reflections upon our lives, during this time of Lent.