

Today you be will be with me in Paradise

Years ago I got a small poster from the Museum of Art in New York. I had it “canvassed” to fill a space in my family room. This lack lustre painting suddenly comes alive when sunlight streams into the room. I can see shrubs, trees and shadows in the garden Morceau in Paris created by the famous painter Claude Monet.

Light transforms everything in its path.

Light excites the visual elements, the rods and cones in the retina so we can see.

Light influences our melatonin levels and determines our sleep/wake cycles.

Light falling on our skin activates the vitamin D precursors so we can produce Vitamin D.

Light falling on the pineal gland removes our depression.

Light causes the process of photosynthesis in plants and causes them to grow and produce our food.

I can go on about light, but the neatest thing about light is ‘seeing the light’, experiencing the transforming power of our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross to save us.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world and this message has not changed over the years. God’s love is manifest to us in Jesus Christ. The story of the crucifixion is the culmination of Jesus’ physical life on earth. Jesus hung on the cross between 2 prisoners. He had an inscription ‘Hail King of the Jews’ over his head. One prisoner taunted him just like the crowd that had formed with, ‘If you are the the King of the Jews save yourself and us’. The other implored him with ‘Jesus remember me when you come into your throne’, and Jesus said, ‘Today you shall be with me in paradise’.

Let's set the stage for the transfiguration, today's reading. From very early in man's relationship with God we erred in not following his commandments and sinned, the story of Adam and Eve is only one example. God sent Jesus his son to redeem the world and Jesus got prepared for this great mission from early days in his life.

Do you remember the time that he was traveling in Jerusalem and Jesus disappeared while his parents travelled back home. When his parents went looking for him, they found him in the temple praying. He said 'Don't you know I have to be about my father's business?' (Luke 2: 39-52.)

Do you remember when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast and restored the festive mood to the party at his mother's prompting? Jesus was aware that his father had plans for him to save the world. During the week before the transfiguration Jesus took the disciples to Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples 'Who do men say I am'. Their reply told Jesus that the public perceived him like one of the prophets, but the disciples by then had an inkling that he was the Messiah, so when he asked Peter 'And who do you say that I am?' Peter's response was well received by Jesus and Peter said 'You are the Messiah, the son of God'. Peter's confession was the landmark in how Jesus would communicate with the disciples in the future as he now began to tell the disciple about his coming ordeal, that he would die and rise again (Mathew 8:29). He also instructed them not to tell anyone.

So what happened at the transfiguration? Jesus' clothes shone forth in glory like a bright light and Elijah and Moses appeared, a cloud overshadowed them and a voice from heaven said 'This is my only begotten son in whom I am well pleased'. The disciples who were fast asleep woke up and saw Elijah and Moses and Peter then said, 'Let us build three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'.

The transfiguration served to make the disciples grounded so that when Jesus was nailed to the cross with his outstretched arm, he radiated an inner light that never faded towards the world, to his disciples, and to the prisoner beside

him, and he said to him 'Today you shall be with me in paradise'. It is miraculous that despite Jesus' pain and agony on the cross he still had enough love in his heart to extend it to the prisoner.

The transfiguration helps us understand the Trinity, the concept of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, all 3 were present at the transfiguration, and in our lives we celebrate trinity at Holy Communion. Walking with Jesus in his light, we share with him paradise in heaven at the time of our death. The relevance of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration represents the presence of the law and the prophets. Jesus becomes established as the one true reconciliation from sin and replaces the role of the law and the prophets in the new testament. It gave the disciples a taste of the Glory and Majesty of our God. This victorious Jesus would become more apparent at Jesus' resurrection. We are all created in God's image and transformation in our lives is taking the light from Jesus Christ combined with our faith to deal with the issues in our lives and in the world, and by walking with Jesus in his light we will share with him paradise in heaven. John 8:16 says 'I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'. So very simply, the all knowing and all powerful God used Jesus his son as a medium to reach out to us.

Jesus' agony and humanity on the cross are the most treasured ways of explaining God's love to us. The two prisoners beside Jesus, one repentant and the other negligent, represent our acceptance or rejection of him today.

My spiritual life has been uncomplicated, growing up in a family with a mother, father and grandmother, 2 elder sisters and extended family members. We were baptized into the Porus Anglican church in Jamaica at a time when the church still represented community. My resolve to stay with loving Jesus from a young age saw me through high school, university and graduate school and was very meaningful growing my own family, who never escaped the relevance of Christmas and other festivals and who also served in the church. This commitment has enriched my life and has helped me grow in respect and reverence for all things in nature. As a biologist and someone who has delved into the world of Genetics I marvel how we are wonderfully and beautifully made. In our world today there is a paradigm

shift for example, in how we view death and dying, in how we view conception. In vitro fertilization is now an acceptable method as we have the backup techniques of amniocentesis and chromosome analysis. In spite of these shifts the one constant as a Christian, is our inner beacon that navigates us through these difficult ethical issues. In my life I have relied on prayer to direct any decisions regarding family or work. When we lived overseas (Chris my husband worked with CUSO) or returned to Canada, we found the church to be a stabilizing influence in our lives.

During the Lenten season we are called to look inwardly at ourselves, to learn about forgiveness and to align our desires with ways in which we can serve God better. We have learned about forgiveness and reconciliation, so now we are ready to grasp the good news of transfiguration and salvation through Jesus' death on the cross, and today like the prisoner at Jesus side, grasp that promise of eternal life.

I want to finish with the beautiful hymn 'Immortal Invisible' that conveys the powerful message of God's light in our lives.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all to life Thou givest, to both great and small;  
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;  
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
And wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,  
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;

All laud we would render: O help us to see  
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee.