

**Homily      Lent 2      Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2010.**

**Mass Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28-36.**

*"You have created us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are forever restless until they rest in you,"* writes St. Augustine. Lent invites us to explore this restlessness, listen to it, and understand it. Lent doesn't so much invite us to become hungry but presupposes that we already are hungry, possibly seriously so, but are not in touch with that, are often very distracted from that, and maybe avoiding the desert which can be the real place of encounter with our searching and our hungers, and most importantly with their huge potential.

Here's a true life example: A man is struggling with his addiction to alcohol - with a deep restless hunger. His misunderstanding of this hunger within himself has cost him the loss of his wife, his children, his home, his job, and eventually his self-respect and his will to live. He has ended up sleeping in doorways, stealing whenever and whatever he can, and begging for a few pence from passers-by. Now he is wild bearded, with a mop of shaggy, dirty, tangled hair and he smells terrible. He hasn't listened to what his true pain and hunger are really about, and therefore hasn't been able, along with his wife and his family and his friends, to give this pain and hunger a proper hearing, and so discover a meaning and direction for them. He hasn't therefore carried them to God but let Satan beguile him into thinking that just one more drink will offer a solution. The real issue isn't the alcohol of course; alcohol is merely the mask he's using to hide behind. The Devil's purpose in the wilderness is to keep us behind masks and away from the reality of who we truly are and therefore who we can most creatively become. That's why he will always tell people that sacramental confession doesn't matter, that they have committed only little sins and that they don't really need mention them or to go to confession. He knows that speaking out means owning up, which means taking control, which means a loss of influence for him. He knows that it is the little things that are in fact the most damaging, so he will tell us very reasonably that they aren't important and that God will forgive, so I just need to say sorry in my head and it'll be OK. Of course God is forgiving but then this isn't about God and His capacity to forgive, but about me and my capacity to take responsibility for my life. And Satan will use anything that he knows I can succumb to in order to keep me away from doing that, and from taking true responsibility for what may be more seriously hurting me or isolating me. He can mask it by shopping, alcohol, internet porn, food, work, TV, gambling, collecting budgerigars, anything. He'll begin in little ways, imperceptible ways, ways that he will say don't matter. He will use anything, to ensnare us and destroy us. A great favourite of his of course is religion, because it can be the most damaging as well as one of the best and most subtle camouflages. Those who murdered Jesus were deeply religious people – 'doing God's will.'

Now this man is trapped terribly. One Saturday afternoon, he is sitting on a footpath, propped up against a lamppost, with the remains of a bottle of cheap wine in one hand, and the other hand held out to passers-by. A young woman passes by, turns around, and puts a 50p coin in his hand. She then continues on her journey. The man is riveted with a sudden flash of recognition. It is his own daughter, and she hasn't recognised him. He tries to call out, even to stand up, but he can't do either. He literally crawls around the corner on all fours and then staggers into a nearby car park behind a building. He falls on his face and cries out to God from the depths of his soul, "please, please God help me!"

What a moment that was, that recognition of his daughter, and not only recognition of her but of himself. What was that light which shone on where he truly was, what he had truly become? More significantly we could ask: *Who* was that Light which shone within this man?

It was a moment of transfiguration, a mountain-top experience, an agonising gift. From that moment he never drank again. Now he has regained everything, and although his wife has since died his whole life is taken up with his family, his four daughters and his grandchildren. Most importantly he has become such an eloquent apostle of the power of God within all of us. His God is real, intimate and completely befriending. *His life now inwardly radiates.*

This illumination comes through what the Christian mystics have sometimes referred to as a light that is apparently dark, a silence that is apparently empty. St. Teresa of Avila referred to it as 'God's dazzling darkness.' The prologue of St John's gospel speaks of Christ as the Light entering the world, that the world doesn't understand as light at all, a light so profound that the world's darkness cannot overcome it. It's the light that shone in that car-park – from within, from a dark and empty place. I have my darkness, my silences, so do you. Lent invites me to stay with them a while, become still, look, watch, listen – enter into their cloud and listen to another voice: *"My Son is here, listen to Him."*

The light that shone on the face of Jesus on Mt. Tabor was not from this world. Immediately before the transfiguration of Jesus, Luke recalls that Jesus had been speaking about the approach of His passion, and how the cross is inescapable for anyone who follows Him - the darkness of the Passion. Immediately after coming down the mountain, Luke recalls how Jesus expelled the darkness from a boy whom Satan had been terrorising with his evil influence. In the midst of these two dark nights, stands Christ, His face radiant with a new brilliance that no darkness, however deep, can extinguish. *It is a particular sort of radiance that shimmers and glows in the dark.* He wants the same in your life and mine.

What is being offered here to you and I is that, deep within us, behind every trauma, behind everything within us that might in some way correspond to the man in the car park in his own dark night, there is within us, deeper than the darkness, that inner radiance from the hidden face of Christ. Within you and me there is a radiance that glows in the dark like the warm dark glowing of embers beneath the ashes. And it is precisely because of this that in those darkest moments and days and situations in our lives we can say with Peter, although he didn't know what he was saying at the time and he will not know the significance of saying it until later on either – *"Lord it is wonderful for us to be here."* As that man crawled on all fours into the car-park and cried for help he saw a glow in the dark which lit up something in him so powerfully, like lightning, that he could adopt an altogether new life. Looking back he might say, although he could never have felt it at the time, "Lord it was wonderful to have been there!"

So, Lent is this special time when we connect with that hunger and darkness that can so easily be misunderstood by us as simply darkness, simply emptiness, simply dryness, simply silence from God, simply evidence of His absence, and Satan will tell us that is so, when in fact it is what the mystics call 'God's dazzling darkness,' light from another world, that our spirit's eyes have yet to get used to seeing by – and that takes time, and courage and faith. It is the radiance on the face of Christ's deep *impregnable, immeasurable, indelible inner presence.* Lent is that special time when we look and listen within to this inner presence. If we can use Lent each year, and the discipline of silence and solitude whenever they can be entered into throughout the year, to stay on this desert mountain top and look and wait and listen, and enter that cloud of apparent darkness and silence, then we too shall be able to say not only in spite of all our hard knocks and challenges, *but because of them.* "Lord it is good for us to be here, precisely

here at this point in my life, at this moment, at this time of holy recognition of you and your presence within and through me.” We are led to ask certain questions: What can this teach me? What can I learn from this? What hidden treasure lies here that I may draw from so as to be able, more freely, to put myself at the service of others, in empathy for them; those whose difficulties may be much more serious than my own? We shall here the voice of the Father gently speaking to us through the darkness – *“My Son is here, listen to Him.”*