

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL PRE-LENT SUNDAY
2020 CATHEDRAL EUCHARIST

2 Peter 1 v 17 He received honour and glory from the Father.

'Gloria in excelsis Deo', Glory to God in the highest, echoing the song of the angels to mark the birth of Jesus has been sung for the last time on a Sunday until on Easter Day when we rejoice in our Lord's mighty resurrection from the dead. The Gloria is a wonderful outburst of praise to God, during which we also acknowledge that we who would honour God, are sinful people in need of his forgiveness. 'Have mercy upon us' we pray before going on to acknowledge Christ and the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.

'Glory' is a word frequently used in worship as we approach God and sing in hymns, 'To God be the glory, great thing he has done' or Bp Thomas Ken's evening hymn 'Glory to thee my God, this night, For all the blessings of the light'. In Mattins and Evensong every psalm and canticle concludes with 'Glory be to Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost'. Glory is a term we use in this context to give, honour and praise to God, a word which expresses something of our understanding of the very being of God, our appreciation of his relationship with us as Creator,

Redeemer and Sanctifier. Giving glory to God is an essential part of our worship, our approaching the throne of grace, in response to His love. As the 17th Westminster Confession has it 'the chief end and highest delight of man is glorify to God and fully enjoy him forever'.

All 3 of our Scripture readings on this last Sunday before Lent are concerned with glory. But, in the way which often frustrates those for whom English is not their first language, the glory to which they refer has a different if related meaning. These passages are not about the glory we give but that which we are privileged to receive, though it may, indeed that should lead us with the angels to give glory to God. The story of Moses on Mt Sinai and that of the Transfiguration of Jesus to which 2 Peter refers describe the revelation of the divine glory. Jesus 'received honour and glory from God'.

In the Book of Exodus we have a vivid manifestation of the hidden power and reality of God, through natural phenomena – the cloud, the shekinah which in ancient Israel was a sign of the very presence God. To those observing, the appearance of the Lord was like a devouring fire on top of the mountain. The glory of God and that real sense of the presence of God become almost one and the same. For many people,

not least poets, it is their experiences in the natural world which have awakened them to the divine, to an understanding that there is more to life than existence – a glorious sunset, the grandeur of a mountain peak, a bed of snowdrops, the birth of a baby.... the list is almost infinite because different people find glory in differing experiences which is not surprising if with the prophet Habakkuk we recognise that 'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord's glory'. Jesus' Transfiguration on that mountainside in the presence Peter, James & John is a turning point in our Lord's life and ministry as it is related in the Synoptic Gospels. 6 days before Peter had confessed that Jesus, their teacher, was indeed the promised Messiah, the Christ. They were at last perhaps beginning to grasp His real significance. The late NT scholar Canon John Fenton describes this as 'the manifestation of Jesus as he is or will be, the veil separating the invisible from the visible world, future from present is removed for a moment and truth is revealed'. Jesus had now to teach the disciples just what being the Messiah involved.

The mood changes as Jesus looks increasingly towards Jerusalem and His Passion. That morning the 3 disciples were given an experience in that they saw Jesus for who He truly was. The glory of that moment spoke to them of His divine nature – the fulfilment of God's promises represented by Moses and Elijah –

Law and prophets. This was indeed God's beloved Son to whom they must listen. 'Glory' moments in our lives bring ecstasy, thrill and often a sense of humility. It is little wonder that Peter should want to stay there, to build shelters, to keep the moment or that they experienced a sense of fear. Such reactions are common for those who have that acute sense of God's presence. But life is not always like that. We do not live on the spiritual mountain top yet such precious experiences do affect our on going lives. They may lead us to make momentous decision or help us cope in difficult times. If our transfiguration moment matters, what we do with our lives as a result is even more important. Those disciples had to go down the mountain – back to normality to life with its ups and downs, to be confronted with a very sick child.

Ash Wednesday marks turning point in the Church's year as we begin to prepare to share once more in our Lord's saving death and resurrection. Each Sunday for short time we come aside specifically to focus on God in Christ in this Eucharist, both to give Him the glory and to seek a deeper appreciation of His glory revealed in Jesus and in creation and in other people. Like Peter we may wish to linger in the safety of this place or at least keep that sense of spiritual well being alive as we move out. But, centred as it is on Jesus

Christ our worship reminds us that the glory of God is ultimately, paradoxically and supremely revealed not on the mount of Transfiguration but on the hill of Calvary, on the Cross. Lent is our annual opportunity to look again at where we find the glory revealed in Christ. This year's diocesan Lent Course, being used across the Church of England invites us to focus on Creation. It is a reminder that God's glory which Wordsworth experienced in the Lakeland daffodils should move us to glorify him by living in such a way which truly treasures God's gift in creation, making the sacrifices required to renew the earth, to properly use its resources and to share them with those whose need is greatest. The discipline of Lent should not be a burden as we seek to control our less attractive habits but a joyous privilege of deepening our sense of the glory of God in worship and prayer so that we may, with our Lord, find glory in the service of others, not least in our attitude to the earth on which we all live.

In what I admit is now a very dated passage the early 20thc writer G.K.Chesterton wrote this 'it is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory, if being in his grace you do it as your duty. To go to communion worthily gives God great glory, but to take food in thankfulness and

temperance, gives God glory too.....He is so great that all things give him glory, if you mean they should. So then, live'. May that glory of God so clearly revealed in Jesus shine and through each of us.