

LENT 2C

There is a story told about this man walking through the African jungle. He came across a hungry lion. When he spotted the man he gave chase. The man ran as fast as his legs could take him and barely made it up a tree. In no time at all the lion was sitting beneath the tree smacking his lips. The man decided to pray to God that the lion would no longer feel that hungry. Next thing, to his amazement the lion adopted a position of prayer, joining his paws and reverently bowing his head. So he asked the lion if he was praying. 'Yes,' said the lion, 'I'm saying grace before meals'. The Lion's posture may have changed but his heart remained the same.

The Gospel today tells us that the experience of the transfiguration on Mt Tabor happened in the context of prayer. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain and, as they prayed, the reading said, He was transfigured. Unlike the lion, genuine prayer should bring about a transformation, or if you like a transfiguration, in us too.

Prayer takes us on a journey away from self-love towards love of God, who knows all our needs. If, in my everyday life, the world revolves round me, that may colour the way I pray as well. If my prayer is exclusively centred on myself and my perceived needs that may be one of the reasons I don't immediately get what I pray for.

And then there are those who only pray in a crisis. During the war they used say, 'there are no atheists in foxholes' If you notice round the church there are a couple of fire doors which are meant to be used only in an emergency. Sometimes that's how we are with God. Our contact with God is limited to a 999 call. But Jesus is there for us all the time and not just at crisis moments.

I believe that a lot of our personal problems can be minimised through genuine prayer. For that change to happen, however,

we need to get our prayer priorities right. The Lord's Prayer is an excellent example. You will notice in the Our Father, petitions are in the order of importance. Firstly we pray that God's Kingdom may come and that His will may be done on Earth as in Heaven and only after that do we focus on ourselves. But even here what we ask for is anything but self-serving but in line with what is good for us in God's eyes. We say, 'give us our daily bread to sustain us', forgive us our sins as we forgive others, help us steer clear of temptation and protect us from the Evil One' who doesn't mind us rattling off prayers when our hearts are not in it.

But we must not grow weary and give up. I notice from the transfiguration scene that the apostles were heavy with sleep. Sometimes we're so jaded that the last thing we want to do is pray. So perseverance is called for.

St Paul in today's reading talks about people destined to be lost. I think it was St Patrick, whose feast day is today, who said that the person who prays will be saved and the person who doesn't pray will be lost. Let his words not be lost on us as we journey nearer Easter.