

Second Sunday of Lent. Ben Frie SJ

As our understanding of the dynamics of our lives, our powers and our opportunities grows, it becomes increasingly clear to us that we receive our life instead of creating it ourselves. Growing up, children discover their world as something they can create themselves: they learn to arrange life according to their wants and desires. The adolescent discovers wisdom and experiences that his creative powers are limited. Finally, the adult sees how he is only a part of a much larger field of forces, much larger than himself. It is not we who tell our story, but our life tells us a story: a long series of occurrences and events that make us spectators rather than players in our lives.

The young man is given freedom, allowed to taste love at one point, and to protest against injustice if he wants - but his life became more and more a reality that transcends him. Within us lives a desire for perfection that drives us to bring fulfilment to our lives ourselves - but the result remains beyond our control. We can hope that the world will develop well, that there will be a future for our children but it is far from perfect for now. Our materiality holds us down.

For a moment there was a moment in Jesus' life when perfection was visible. His unlimited divinity became visible. A flash, a peak experience. His clothes become 'shiny as the light', He changes appearance, shape as the full truth of His life comes to light and becomes visible. A flash, for a moment the perfection of heaven is overwhelming. And then it is gone. Eternity shows itself in the finite and temporal, but it cannot remain and then all is as it was, almost. The story of Jesus' transformation is like a fairy tale about our own inner life. We build our own existence, but gradually experience that our identity is given to us.

When Abraham comes to that understanding, in other words, when he comes to faith, he receives his identity. He is told: 'Depart from your land, your tribe, your family'. As if it were no big deal. But that's what faith demands: to leave your safe certainties and let God shape you. No longer creating your own freedom, but fully accepting and absorbing the life given to you, reconciling yourself to it.

For Abraham, this meant: breaking with a complacent life and surrendering to the uncertainty of life with God that slowly showed itself in his. For Jesus, it meant: accepting his calling, his destiny to bear witness to the life of God in us. In other words: bringing people to self-denial, giving people the insight that learning to receive is more beautiful than just continuing to believe in yourself.

Constantly, the testimony of Jesus evokes resistance, counter-reactions. Misunderstanding, fear, annoyance. People do not want to hear that they are not self-sufficient. But Jesus' testimony is stronger than people. As his divine reality becomes visible, Moses and Elijah join him. They represent Law and Prophets: all the Bible is completed in the encounter with the heavenly Jesus.

The all-transcending brilliance we want to hold: once heaven is here, it must stay here. Three tents! Look at the tents in refugee camps, look at the tents after the earthquakes. What is more preliminary? If we try to hold on to our experience of God, we are powerless. What we do with our abilities is terribly inadequate compared to what God gives us. But we are given 40 days to realise this properly. 40 days for the growing understanding that we are receivers, and not the Creator.

The completion of Law and Prophets does require the utmost: our life. But the life Jesus gives shines like the light - once more when He died. Heaven has settled here. With us.