A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew (17:1-9)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John
and led them up a high mountain, by themselves,
And he was transfigured before them,
and his face shone like the sun,
and his clothes became dazzling white.
Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.
Then Peter said to Jesus,
"Lord, it is good for us to be here;
if you wish, I will make three tents here,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
While he was still speaking,
suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them,
and from the cloud a voice said,
"This is my Son, the Beloved;
with him I am well pleased;
listen to him!"
When the disciples heard this,
they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.
But Jesus came and touched them, saying,
"Get up and do not be afraid."
And when they looked up,
they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.
As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them,
"Tell no one about the vision
until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.
It is wonderful for us to be here:
A Reflection by SR ANASTASIA REEVES OP from Grace.

As we go to Mass each Sunday, are these the words that come to mind: “Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here”? Certainly they are fitting, but have we made them our own? Are we truly hope-filled in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

Perhaps instead, we are preoccupied by ill health or family problems, financial worries or fear about the future. We might look around and think, “Why are there so few people here?” or “When I was younger this church was full”. Perhaps we are disheartened by the failings of the Church interiorly and the attacks against Christian belief and religious freedom from outside. We might wonder what will become of our world, our nation, our local community and our families.

How can we say, “It is wonderful for us to be here?” In his encyclical, Spe Salvi, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI recognised that our age is marked, not so much by a loss of faith (although that is certainly true), but by a loss of hope. Hope is a desire to enter eternal life, to be happy in God’s kingdom forever. Sometimes we forget that this is our wonderful destiny; that God loves us so much that he sent his Son to dwell among us as a tiny baby — to preach and heal, and ultimately to die and rise so that we may have eternal life. Our destiny begins with our Baptism, and we experience glimpses of it in this life. Finally, we receive the fullness of eternal happiness in the next life. Heaven is real: in that realm, “He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness” (Rev 21:4). The difficulties of our immediate experience are also real, but they do not tell the whole story.

This is the message Christ announces to his apostles and to us in his transfiguration. If you look at this Gospel passage in your Bible, you will see that, just before and just after the

transfiguration, Jesus warns the apostles that he is about to suffer and die. Jesus and his followers are moving towards a terrible evil — his torture and brutal execution. Yet, in the midst of it, Christ reveals his glory to his closest friends, which silently conveys all of his promises: “In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33). “There are many rooms in my Father's house” (Jn 14:2). “Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:54). God has created from nothing all that exists, including time, and one day even time will come to an end, making way for a new heaven and a new earth. In his transfiguration, Christ puts before us his glory and our future happiness. Then, he veils himself again in his ordinary appearance, and most especially in his bloody passion.
And so, we come to the Eucharist each week, where Jesus' body and blood, soul and divinity are truly present, though veiled under the appearance of bread and wine. Just so, our eternal destiny is veiled behind our present circumstances, whether they are joyful, mundane or tragic. But, one day the veil will be lifted — we will see Jesus face-to-face and be free forever from all sorrow.

Perhaps over the course of Lent you might also like to go to Mass an extra day during the week as an act of hope. By doing so, we proclaim, “I have an eternal destiny. I am loved by the God who created all things from nothing, and nothing but my own resistance can get between his love and me”. Let us then come to Mass confident that, despite appearances, it really is wonderful to be here.
And another perspective on the Transfiguration....

“Stand up and don’t be afraid.” Now there’s a motto for Lent. These words are the only words that Jesus says in the whole transfiguration event. Just after the voice from the cloud says “Listen to him!” Jesus very next words are “Stand up and don’t be afraid”. “Listen to him” says the voice. “Stand up and don’t be afraid,” says Jesus. Just after the Transfiguration experience, Jesus is calling on Peter, James and John to be transfigured themselves — to move beyond being paralysed, fearful, timid. They are to stand up and not to be afraid; they are to be formed into a faithful, hopeful, courageous community. And with us: Jesus invites us to be transfigured ourselves. That is what Lent is all about.

Fear, grief and anxiety can be great driving forces in our lives. We only need to think of what is happening at the moment — the mere mention of a virus creates fear and uncertainty. It is one thing being sensible and prudent — it is another being anxious and afraid. The issue is that anxiety and fear don’t get us very far. We go round and round in the same circles — if it is not a virus making us fearful, it is something else. Fear paralyses us. Fear traps us. Grief drains us. We become afraid to act, afraid to let go, afraid of tomorrow, afraid of joy itself, caught in a constant cycle. Our fears make us strangers to joy. Anxiety can provide us with energy, but often it can be the energy to run away, rather than run to something – or to someone. We can be afraid of who we truly are.

Pope Francis once said that there are Christians whose lives seem to be like Lent without Easter. It might also be true that there are some Christians whose lives are like Easter without Lent. We need to find a balance between these two arms of the Paschal Mystery. Lent is the awareness of our sinfulness – a recognition that we often find ourselves doing selfish things, living in anger or fear or resentment or self-absorption. Easter, on the hand, is the surprising joy of the new life that Christ calls us into — to “stand up and not be afraid”.

Easter joy is being freed from our narrowness and self-absorption. Faith, hope and peace — the opposite of fear, despair and anxiety — is born as a flicker of light, a whispered voice which gives us a personal assurance that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.

Peter, James and John were overshadowed by their uncertainties, anxieties, and fears. There they were — on the mountain top with nowhere to go. Like Peter, James and John, we sometimes need some direct words to snap ourselves out of a particular situation. “Get on your feet” Jesus says bluntly. “Don’t be trapped by fear, or apathy, or debilitating sadness.”
If Lent is about anything, it is about these very words. Jesus saying to each and everyone of us, “Stand up and don’t be afraid.” Lent isn’t about a prolonged time of spiritual mourning – a kind of self-obsessed journey into our interior darkness. Self-reflection is part of it, but not the whole of it. The point of Lent is that we become transfigured people, a resurrected people, a people who live in the light rather than the darkness. The journey to our heart, our inner selves, is not meant to be soul destroying, but soul reviving.

And Lent is not just a personal journey, but a communal one as well. That is why Peter, James and John were there as a community. We seek to become transfigured people together, as a community, as a church. Throughout every season of the Church’s year, every season of our life, we are called to listen to the voice of Jesus. His words, “Stand up and do not be afraid,” are spoken to each and every one of us today. As we enter into this Eucharist, let us ask ourselves, what is Jesus saying to the individual circumstances of each of our lives today? In whatever ways we hear Jesus addressing our lives, he is calling all of us to transfiguration this Lent. Jesus is calling us to glow with Easter joy and hope through the grace and love God is offering us in this very moment.