

## 2019 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT

Peter, James and John had been with Jesus for two years. They had heard every sermon and seen every miracle. They thought they knew Him pretty well. They had come to believe that He was the Messiah- but for all of that- basically they saw Him as a man like themselves.

They knew that the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were all powerful in Jerusalem, were scheming to have Jesus executed by the Romans. And they sensed that if ever Jesus visited Jerusalem that these cruel people would be successful. The apostles were convinced, therefore, that Jesus was totally wrong in His decision to continue on up to Jerusalem for the Passover.

Jesus asked Peter, James and John to join Him in a time of prayer and to talk things through- far away from everyone- at the summit of Mt. Tabor. There at the top of Mt Tabor, with the green fields of Galilee to the North and the brown shrub-land of Samaria to the South, Jesus knelt in prayer. And right before the eyes of Peter, James and John, Jesus' shabby, dust-covered clothes became as brilliant as lightening. His face shone with an inner light, suffused in rapture. Jesus was transfigured.

St John would later write: "At that moment we saw His glory."

In a twinkling as they gazed at Him transfigured that day on Mt Tabor, Peter, James and John knew that Jesus was not just a man. He was also divine. For a few intense moments Peter, James and John glimpsed Jesus' inner reality. And their lives were changed forever. For the rest of their lives they would dedicate themselves to bringing people of all nations to this fundamental belief –that Jesus was God.

On Friday all of us would have had a moment of insight which just like the Apostles will change our thinking forever. But our moment of insight was fundamentally different from that of the Apostles. For the Apostles it was a moment of ecstasy and rapture. For us it was a moment of grief- possibly of despair. None of us will ever forget that moment when we first heard that a huge number of devout Muslims had been slaughtered as they knelt in prayer- here in our beloved New Zealand. The shock of it is imprinted into our memories. And sadly, I suspect, most of us have been changed; and not for the better.

We have always believed New Zealand to be a safe country. Yes, in our country people have their disagreements and sometimes people get so filled with hatred that they become physically violent. Murders are not uncommon.

But for a person to mow down total strangers with a machine gun just because they are members of a race different than their own is unprecedented.

Friday afternoon was a moment when we knew for the first time that Extremists live among us. We must live with this fact.

But this does not mean that we should retreat into our shells. God has gifted us life to be enjoyed. We must continue to embrace it.

In this Jesus is our model. He knew that going up to Jerusalem would be horribly hazardous. He knew that there was every chance that He would be crucified. And he knew that God could not protect Him if people decided to attack Him. But He went- serenely- knowing that God would be with Him and would give Him the courage to face up to whatever lay ahead.

The Father knew Jesus would soon have to face the Agony in the Garden. He prepared Him for this time on Mt. Tabor. During His time of agony Jesus would have remembered that sublime moment on Mt. Tabor and He would have been strengthened. God is good.

God loves us. God loves us with a love as vast as the Universe. God will not abandon us in times of distress. God prepares us for any trials we may be called on to face. And during those trials we will be given mighty graces enabling us to be strong.

Not one of those 49 people who were murdered on Friday afternoon will have been left alone by God. During their last moments they would have been enveloped in a wondrous love. Not one of those who are recovering in Hospital will be left deserted. Their angels will be beside them and God's graces will empower them to be courageous.

Yes, we all probably feel a whole lot less safe now. There may well be other similar idiots in our community who will be inspired to imitate the evil done in Christchurch. But no matter what happens, we are not alone. We are loved- deeply. God is walking with us.

God of Peace: we pray for all the victims of the tragic violence in Christchurch on Friday. May those who were injured experience Your love and healing. May those who have lost their lives enter the fullness of Your love. May all those who suffer the pain and loss of their loved ones know Your support.

O God, we pray for all Muslims in New Zealand in this tragic time. Like us they have faith in one God. May they feel the compassion and love of all of us New Zealanders. Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.