

Transfiguration

In 2001 the computer animated film Shrek appeared in cinemas. It was clear from the very beginning that this fairy tale's adaptation was quite different from the usual ones. In the film in fact, prince charming is not noble but the bad guy, and the two main characters are ogres, green, and not fully size zero and quite unorthodox in their manners. I remember watching this film in amusement, surprised by the unpredictability of the plot. Luckily the happy ending was there! Because we like happy endings, don't we?

Despite finding the plot of most fairy tales obvious, we expect happy endings; where the bad ones lose and the good ones live happily ever after. It is a must and in a way it reassures us, which is a very basic human need. There is only a certain amount of awkwardness that we can experience; after that, we need to be reassured, we need to know that what is happening around us can be analysed and explained, a kind of '*see it, say it, sort it*' attitude.

I wonder if Peter and the disciples were experiencing the same feelings. In the previous chapter before today's gospel reading, Jesus has announced his imminent suffering, death and resurrection, only to be stopped and rebuked by an uncertain and unsatisfied Peter. The same Peter who, after having '*see it and say it*', now was following Jesus on the mountain in order to '*sort it*'.

Peter truly believes in Jesus. He really wants to worship him as the Messiah, but Peter does not understand Jesus fully. Thinking of the fairy tales, Peter's idea of a Messiah was what we could call today a super hero: a glorious and powerful king, full of wisdom, a valorous knight able to overpower the Roman Empire and the corrupted religious classes in Jerusalem. Peter is looking for this triumphant Messiah and for *the* happy ending. He goes on the mountain; he follows Jesus with full expectation of finally solving the mystery around Jesus.

Imagining his confusion, when at the mountaintop the mystery around Jesus intensifies, Peter and the other two disciples experience something extraordinary and beautiful: Jesus transforms himself, becoming a source of light, and is translucent. In a way, at this stage, we might imagine Peter to be surprised but at least satisfied: he has finally seen the Messiah in all his glory and power! However, he is not satisfied, because he cannot understand what is happening.

When the confines between the divine and the human blurs, something revelatory and yet disorienting happens. Furthermore, Moses and Elijah appear and start talking with Jesus. I guess this is the point where Peter is totally lost. Figures from the past, an incredible light, this is way too much for Peter. He can feel the fear rising. It is an ancestral fear in front of a mystery, a wonder.

Peter would preferably rather not see, not to be there, and in his fear he appeals to his logic: "*Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings*" In front of a wonder, instead of falling to his knees and acknowledging the awe of the moment; Peter fastens to his human logic, reducing the marvel, so: Jesus is not the Messiah any more but a less intimidating teacher; Moses and Elijah are not figures from the past but human beings needing a shelter for the night; and the amazing- holy-setting is an ordinarily 'good thing'. Seized by fear, Peter cannot trust, cannot acknowledge the wonder all around. In fear Peter needs to fill the silence with words, with acts; Peter needs to regain control.

And what about us? Are we still able to wonder? To see the miracles around us with goose bumps? When was the last time we experienced something so amazing which has left us astonished and delighted? Or should I ask when was the last time we tried to reduce something amazing by explaining it with our human logic?

Ched Myers, activist and writer focussed on social justice, in his political commentary to the gospel of Mark, writes on how traditional imperial exegesis has tried to connect the Transfiguration with the resurrection, in order to *rescue* the theology of the cross. He continues by saying, I quote, "though we may not fully understand the theology of the cross, we must nevertheless hold fast to the 'word' of the cross, the new way of discipleship"

And so, I am wondering if, like Peter, we are afraid of the cross and we prefer simply to focus on the resurrection, to the happy end. I wonder if we prefer a glorious Jesus, and are tempted to minimise Jesus' command to take our cross and follow him, because we struggle with a Jesus who is suffering, naked and weak. Or perhaps we connect the cross with penitence and deeds and in fear of diminishing God's incredible grace, we try to logically blur the cross, focussing on the resurrection. And yet, how can we understand the resurrection without acknowledging the cross and Jesus's death? And what does it mean to bear the cross today in our society?

At the time of Jesus, the cross was a scandal, a shame for the crucified and their family. And yet we know how central that scandal is in God's plan of salvation: the cross that was the symbol of the hegemony of the Roman Empire has become the place where God is the closest to humanity.

Are we afraid of the cross? What is it there that makes us afraid? Is it the poverty? The loneliness? The exposure of our real self? Is it the powerlessness? When we think of Jesus on his way to the cross, he is lonely and in bondage but paradoxically he is the freest ever. In his poverty, in his powerlessness he is showing a way to be king and to be a saviour that falls outside the world's game of domination and power. The cross is scandal because it offers an alternative way of living: a way

full of social justice, equality, the way of love that turns upside down the power dynamics, a way where the last are the first, a way that will lead us to wonders. We cannot meet Jesus unless we follow him on this way. Does it mean that we have to beat ourselves and become martyrs? Probably not.

I guess we take our cross and follow Jesus when we walk with the naked of this world, when we walk with the powerless of this world, with those who are disadvantaged because of their race, background, faith, means and instruction. We take up our cross when we say no to an economy who exploits and deprives people; we take up our cross and follow Jesus when we choose fair trade products, when we consume less, go green, and think of the future generation. We take up our cross and follow Jesus when we expose the unfairness of a privileged minority, when we give voice to those who have no power to speak their injustice.

That's the real scandal: to be free and brave to expose our vanities and comforts which promotes us by plundering others. That's the real scandal, when we let go of our logical power and we follow the way of love! That's the scandal, when instead of filling the silence, we trust that God is there speaking! That's the scandal, when we recognise God's love around us, we fall to our knees and we wait in awe.

Dear friends, the transfiguration is a temporary glimpse into God's glory. The cross is a way to live our life. Both the Transfiguration and the Cross are leading us towards THE happy ending. They lead us ultimately home, where resurrection and salvation have conquered death forever. Amen

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