



St Marylebone
Parish Church

The Sunday Next Before Lent 2021, 11am Sung Eucharist

‘Six days later’ today’s Gospel tantalizingly begins. Six days later than what? The answer: Jesus telling us that He is to go to Jerusalem, suffer and die and on the third day rise again. The stage is set, the way lies ahead.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter, beginning this week with Ash Wednesday’s Eucharists with ashes at 1.10 and 6.30. Do come and start Lent properly or join in online if you can’t.

But today’s Gospel is *not* one of the grim determination of Lenten pilgrimage. It is the dry-cleaner’s charter, the perfect persil ad’ Gospel – ‘his clothes became dazzling white such as no one on earth could bleach them’ and immediately we see Jesus with muddy knees off the rugby pitch and Blessed Mary rolling her eyes – ‘however will I get these stains out’ – like a million teatime ads between quiz shows on ITV.

But today is also a day of blood, rather than mud.

The world is keeping St Valentine today. The Patron Saint of ‘Lurv’, of pink tissue paper and glittery cards. A priest (by legend) who secretly married couples in ‘lurv’ despite a Roman imperial ban, and was martyred for it. Of course, the frontals aren’t red today because Sunday ‘trumps’ the saint

and knocks him into the next day, or to next year. And anyway, St Valentine (being more legend than anything else) has slipped off the church calendar altogether nowadays, behind the saints *actually* now given for 14th February, Ss Cyril and Methodius. Cyril and his brother Methodius took the Gospel to the Slavic peoples in the 800s. Their legacy in the Christian life of central and eastern Europe is immense, and in the development of a written language for the people they evangelized – Cyrillic. They too have been bumped by Sunday to February 14th 2022 instead.

So today isn't about pink chocolates oozing cherry liqueur, or Cyril's pen and ink, or washing powders even; it *is* about the glory that lies ahead of us. Glory.

I know many of us love the beam of light (especially the winter sun) that blasts through the windows in our apse during the Eucharist on Sundays and during the week. A glimpse of heaven in the midst of our earthly pilgrimage.

Likewise, before we plunge into the dark days of Lent, the Transfiguration today. Just as Ss Peter, James and John came off the mountain of light into the valley of darkness that lay ahead for Jesus, we have a glimpse of His eternal glory in the Transfiguration before going with Him into the days of His Passion.

I suspect I'm not alone in feeling pretty tired as we approach Lent this year. Let alone 40 days, for 11 months we've given up friends and fun and family, hugs and touch, and colleagues and school mates. Many have given up good health and even had to give over loved ones to death.

If you're 'not feeling' Lent this year – rest assured you're not alone!

So instead of making a list of things to give up, let the Transfiguration be the ground under our feet.

Jesus has told us that He will suffer and die and rise again, the difficult road lies ahead, but *so* does our destination: on Mount Tabor He reveals His glory.

Even Elijah's miracles and the firey chariot of today's first reading, and even Moses' powers bow down and worship, eclipsed by Christ's glory.

Valentine went to death because he knew that 'God is love and those who live in love live in God', and that that is true whether he lives or dies.

Sts Cyril and Methodius gave every fibre of their being to help perfect strangers discover a life changing relationship in Jesus.

The *glory* that drove today's Saints, and that humbled Moses and Elijah is not a nice idea, or a 'maybe one day' but a reality that transfigured their 'here and now'. A glory that gives meaning and concrete hope under our feet.

So, I'm not going to ask you which chocolate bar or favourite tittle you will be giving up this year.

I *am* going to ask, how shall we step into Christ's glory this Lent? How, in this holy season, can we open our lives to the glory he bears in those pierced hands?

So here's the headline: 'it's not about chocolate bars, it's about glory'.