

A problem of recognition

Today's psalm pleads: *Your presence, O Lord, I seek / Hide not your face from me . . .* Yet by arriving among us as the carpenter of Nazareth the Lord *did* hide his face. Even when Jesus on the day he returned to Nazareth and read from the Book of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me . . . He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind . . .* and said: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing,* they did not recognize him. It circulated among the listeners: *Isn't this the son of Joseph?*

Those suffering from what was called possession (as it seems to be with so many world leaders) recognized him as somebody to fear or resist as when one cried out in the synagogue: *What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God.*

Jesus was not surprised or put off by this failure of others to detect his true identity. In Luke Jesus speaks of John the Baptist – so popular a reformer – and asks: *What did you go out to the desert to see – a reed swayed by a wind? Then what did you go out to*

see? Someone dressed in fine garments . . . who live in royal palaces . . . Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. Yet even John the Baptist was unsure of who Jesus was, so that he sent his disciples to ask him: *Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*

It's clear enough that even Jesus's disciples who latched on to his message of healing and grace – to a degree – were unsure of him. One day Jesus asked them: *Who do the crowds think I am?* And the names of John the Baptist (then deceased) or Elijah were mentioned. Then Jesus asked his disciples the same question and Peter said: *The Messiah of God.* So at least they saw in him the leader of a *national* revival with which Jesus wanted to have no identification; he rebuked them, told them not to tell that to anyone. His identity was always a step ahead of them – until today's Gospel reading.

This Transfiguration narrative encapsulates the ultimate recognition of who Jesus was among his disciples. It's a kind of dawning. Essentially it says that the leading disciples finally saw through to who Jesus was: that he was the face of the absolutely gracious and healing Source of this universe, that he was the heir to both the Law and the Prophets, the

whole Hebrew Testament of old, that he himself was radiant with graciousness as was true God – good news instead of the daily news - leader of an ultimate exodus from enslavement to fullness of Being.

Do you know who you are? Are you only what you have been told to be? Are you living a shallow life, forgetful of the Source of things welling up from within you, revealing your intimate relationship with trees, squirrels, microbes, galaxies as kin . . . to be revered and not abused. Are you an emerging transfiguration of your current self? Today's Gospel is about you and your *real* identity as well as that of Jesus. It takes time. What did St. Paul say? *At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.*