



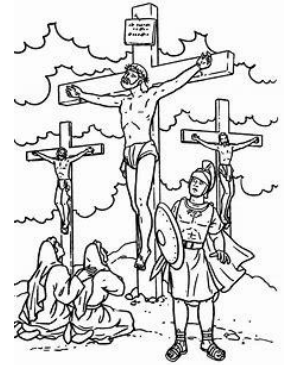
Lent 2

THE NEW SHOFAR

*Finding the glorious Christ on the mountain top is easy.
Finding him in the hurley-burley of the valley below is our
real challenge.*

Take it to the cross of Christ

One of the more powerful and moving Eucharists I have celebrated was at a Lambeth Conference. That is a gathering of all Anglican bishops from around the world. They come together with the Archbishop of Canterbury and make decisions about the direction and state of the Church. The real power of the gathering is in the opportunities it provides for sitting down with bishops from Churches outside of the Western mindset. In particular, with bishops where persecution is a daily reality. Talking with men for whom death is a ever-present reality on account of their faith in Jesus Christ is a genuine gift from God. Makes many of our own complaints about church and what we do or fail to do in the eyes of some seem so shallow and pathetic.



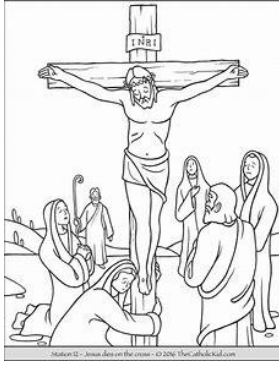
At one particular Eucharist some African bishops had a refrain running throughout the whole of the celebration. One of the bishops would stand up and shout aloud *take it to the cross of Christ*. The message was clear – our burdens, challenges, fears, pains, uncertainties, whatever is going on in our lives, we are to take it to the cross of Christ. We take our joys, the good and the not-so-good in our daily activities to the foot of Christ's cross and join it to his self- sacrifice to the Father in Heaven.

It is from Golgotha we not only have an invitation to view our concerns from a different perspective, but it is there at the foot of the Cross we find light in darkness, the divine commitment to transform and renew the lives of all those who dare come and stand alongside the dying Son of God.

In *taking it to the cross of Christ* we are allowing God to do what God does best – save us; absorb our pain and our anxieties; forgive our sins through merciful love; take up our burdens and lighten whatever loads we feel are consuming us. Sit there at the foot of the Cross and be transformed by the One hanging there.

Well Lord, what have you in mind for me today?

That kind of theology is not some kind of piety beyond most of us. It is a genuine, personal way to live out the professions we all made at our baptisms. I was talking to my neighbour this afternoon, a lovely lady in her 80's, a life-long disciple of Christ. She told me that each morning, when she wakes up, she sits on the edge of her bed and says to God -*Lord, what do you have planned for me today*. That was profoundly beautiful, a faith that shapes that lady's every word and deed.



What an intensely beautiful faith is being proclaimed and expressed in her short devotion! She willingly acknowledges her need of God, the limitations of her ability to control and conquer all that each day throws up to her. At the same time, it is a celebration of the presence of God in her daily activities.

It is also a celebration of hope in action. She believes that it is God who is providing opportunities for her to proclaim the Gospel message of salvation through her word and her deeds. She also moves into the day knowing that what God calls her to be doing, comes with the graces she needs to fulfill her vocation. Betty takes each day *to the cross of Christ*. Her faith is one of God's gifts to me and an encouragement to all of us. If our first step each day takes us to Golgotha, and we ponder what happened there for us, we might be more inclined to become peace-makers, reconcilers, forgivers of wrongs, lovers of all and better able to bring Christ alive for all.

The expectations of Jesus are an inconvenience

Today's celebration of the transfiguration of Jesus comes with an awesome challenge for all of us and provides a framework for our coming week of living the Gospel as disciples of Christ. The danger is that we live our faith in the way those disciples lived theirs – with too much of self and not enough of God.

Here is a question we should ask of the narrative – why could the disciples *not* see this side of Jesus before they climbed that mountain? They had been his companions throughout his ministry. They had witnessed his miracles; had heard his powerful preaching and teaching. They were his closest companions and yet they persisted in living their discipleship on their own terms.

The context here is vital

Jesus eventually drags these disciples to the top of the mountain - after six days. He had earlier spoken of his ministry as being one that will involve his death as an innocent. He will willingly sacrifice his own life for the salvation of all. That was bad enough for the Apostles. It was most certainly not what they had signed on for.

But there was more. Anyone wanting to follow him as a disciple will be expected to take up their own crosses and follow him. How is that for an attractive vocation! They will die as he will die – self-sacrificing, putting the other first, in imitation of the Master's own life and death. No wonder they spent six days arguing over this, trying to come to terms with what Jesus was demanding of them. It is not difficult to see why Jesus was eventually cheesed-off with them.

Therein we have the reason behind the Transfiguration. They had to be shown how the glorious Christ on the top of the mountain was the same Jesus Christ who was with them in the valley below. They (we) need to find Jesus in the valley where the world is at war with itself, and not just on the mountain tops where we are alone with God. That is what *taking it to the cross of Christ means* – more of God. Less of self. Living for the Christ in the other and not demanding that God surrender to our ways.