



**Mass on the occasion of the anniversary  
of the death of don Luigi Giussani**

**SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT 2013**

Homily notes of  
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Marino Institute, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2013

The Gospel of the first Sunday of Lent, which we heard last week, reminded us of how Jesus was tempted and how he stood face to face with Satan in the loneliness of the desert.

This week there is a sharp contrast: we find Jesus once again in a lonely place, this time on a high mountain, but now his appearance changes and we see him mirroring the radiant glory of his father.

It is one of the very rare occasions in his earthly life in which we see the glory of Jesus

appear directly. Normally the Gospel narratives tell us of his journey from village to village, preaching and healing, but outwardly always in human form. Jesus was always reluctant to make direct reference to his identity. He forbade the evil spirits who knew his identity from revealing it. Even in today's Gospel, Jesus reveals himself to the disciples in all his glory, but tells them not to tell others.

Perhaps the best way to describe this event of the Transfiguration and the experience of the disciples is to look on it as a sort of icon. Icons are a form of religious painting which are not like a photograph which everyone can immediately see and understand. Icons present a message which has to be drawn out. It may require that you go back again and again to the same icon as

day by day as you deepen your understanding of it in the light of faith and you begin to identify the different aspects of it and the different figures that appear in it.

Let us look at some aspects of this “icon” in today’s Gospel. The first thing to note is that this revelation, this transfiguration of Jesus, takes place when Jesus is at prayer.

The event is linked to Old Testament images. Peter recognises Elijah and Moses, who represent in Jewish tradition the prophets and the law. He suggests that they build three tents: God in the Old Testament appeared in a tent. The cloud which overwhelms them reminds them of the way in which God appeared to his people in a cloud. What is different are the words used. In the Old Testament, as God presented the



commandments which would be the guide for the life of the people, God called out: “Listen Israel”. Now the Father, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, tells the disciples and us: “Listen to my beloved Son”.

The clear message is that Jesus, the Word made flesh, has become the fulfilment of the law and the prophets, the way and the truth and the life for all. Being a disciple of Jesus means that we listen to the word of God and ponder it, attempt to understand it and see what it means for us in the varied situations of our lives.

Let us return to how this icon stresses the primacy of prayer, without which all our activity, in society in our apostolic efforts, would be reduced to empty activism. When we open our hearts to God, however, he

changes us. God is not a projection of our own ideas and our desires, someone who is created by our thoughts. God is always “the other”, the totally different, who changes our desires and our aspirations, who drives us to go beyond ourselves and the day to day categories of our lives and our culture.

These reflections brought to my mind the homily of Cardinal Ratzinger at the funeral of don Giussani. It is interesting for us this evening to reflect not just on don Giussani’s life, but also on the Petrine ministry of Pope Benedict which draws to an end this week. I was very impressed by Pope Benedict’s address at the Angelus this morning. Saint Peter’s Square will be filled to the brim with people – many of whom were young – who had come, with great enthusiasm, to express

their appreciation and gratitude and personal prayer for the Pope.

But effectively the Pope treated the event as we would any other Sunday: he presented a simple reflection on the Gospel message. His talk was focussed on the message of the Gospel and in no way centred on himself, except for a few short words.

For Pope Benedict as for don Giussani only Christ gives meaning to the whole of our life. At the funeral in Milan Cathedral Cardinal Ratzinger noted how:

Fr Giussani always kept the eyes of his life and of his heart fixed on Christ. In this way, he understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a packet of dogmas, a moralism, Christianity is rather an encounter, a love story; it is an event.



And Pope Benedict attempted to illustrate how don Giussani lived that love relationship with Christ:

This love affair with Christ, this love story which is the whole of [Giussani's] life was however far from every superficial enthusiasm, far from every vague romanticism. Fr Giussani really wanted not to have his life for himself, but he gave life, and exactly in this way found life not only for himself, but for many others... He gave out all the wealth of his heart, he gave out all the divine wealth of the Gospel, with which he was penetrated and, serving in this way, giving his life, this life of his gave rich fruit... and has become really father of many.

This led don Giussani to discern the signs of the time and, in that sense, his life and his teaching are more than ever relevant for us in Ireland today. Again I quote Cardinal Ratzinger:

This centrality of Christ in his life gave [Giussani] also the gift of discernment, of deciphering correctly the signs of the times in a difficult time, full of temptations and of errors, as we know. It was the great temptation of that moment to transform Christianity into a moralism and moralism into politics, to substitute believing with doing.

In the hustle and bustle and hyper activity of our lives today we have to be attentive that we ourselves do not end up thinking that busily doing things will resolve all our difficulties. We all like to be busily doing things but we forget that we can easily get lost in the hectic and frustrated in our failure.

Only a life of prayer and silence and contemplation will open our inner hearts to what the message of Jesus means and thus



enable us to challenge our world and our society where so often the emptiness of noise prevents people from even asking the fundamental questions about life.

Without the dimension of prayer and contemplation all we will offer the world would be a Church built on human planning and such a Church would very quickly end up looking just like any other purely human institutions. As Cardinal Ratzinger stressed in his Milan homily: “whoever does not give God, gives too little”.

When we look at the call of the early disciples we see that Jesus call to discipleship asks us to leave everything. That leaving does not, however, mean a retreat into an idyllic world of safe isolation. It does not in any way indicate that our coming away

from the world means that we create for ourselves an unreal world in which we feel ourselves comfortably surrounded by just the virtuous or those who proclaim themselves to be virtuous. This was the temptation of the disciples in today's Gospel when they suggest that they build the three tents. It is the temptation to flee into a false mysticism from the daily challenges that we face in our Christian calling.

Jesus lived uncontaminated by the world, but he lived fully in the midst of the world of his time. He did not simply preach conversion from a safe distance. Much of don Giussani's initial mission took place within the conflictual and secularised Milan of the sixties. He reached out to those who were living in the midst of that turbulent moment and touched hearts and won them for the

message of Jesus because he knew that any other superficial answer would be empty. That is also our challenge today as we think of the place of the Church in the society of our times. Whoever does not give God, gives too little!