

2nd Sunday Lent (C)

- Karl Marx, the intellectual founder of Communism, was a German who wrote his treatise in England in the late 1800s.
- In one part he wrote: *"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, & the soul of soulless conditions"*.
- What he was saying was that religion was a protest against all that was wrong with the world & that sounds fine until you read the next point he makes: *"It is the opium of the people"*.
- He believed that religion could dull the pain & make people feel good, but it did not solve any problems, but added to them & was addictive.
- He believed that religion was an ineffectual & helpless protest because what it did was to divert attention from the present world – its problems, struggles, evils & injustices – by putting us off with a promise of a paradise where everything was perfect in the hereafter – later, not now.
- Marx was saying in essence that he rejected Christianity because its message was "put up with the bad things now & you'll be rewarded when you die".
- Marx wanted religion to be abolished & he wanted people to put their energy & effort into transforming the here & now; to do anything else was to escape our responsibilities for ourselves & for people of the world.
- I understand Peter in today's Gospel – he wanted to escape, he wanted to stay on the mountain because this was a glimpse of heaven and there he wanted to remain.
- On the mountain with Jesus, James & John, they were away from the problems, struggles & violence of everyday life, away from the violence, brutality, corruption, hatred, confusion & mess of society, & here they experienced the peace, tranquillity & perfection of God's kingdom.
- Peter says – "it's good to be here, let's pitch 3 tents – stay here permanently.
- Peter sounds like the type of Christian Marx criticises – escaping doing anything & just waiting....
- But, unlike Peter, Jesus knew the importance of coming down from the mountain because though it may be tempting to remain, for God's kingdom to break into this world, he had to immerse himself into its violence & ugliness – to suffer it, in order to transform it.
- Having been reaffirmed in his identity as God's son, Jesus comes down & re-enters the fray of everyday existence, dragging the disciples behind him.
- And from this time he heads towards Jerusalem & undergoes the violence of the cross.

- As Paul expresses in the 2nd reading, Jesus left his home in heaven to come into our world to save us, reaching out to those needing to experience his life-giving love by freeing them from all that oppressed them, healing & forgiving them & enabling them to have a vision to work towards.
- He welcomed the stranger, comforted the grieving & embraced the lonely & marginalised; he challenged the corruption of the world in this life; allowed the wickedness of the world to put him to death out of love & commitment to us in this life.
- He transfigured the lives of people he touched – the poor, the sinful, the outcast & the rejected; he set an example for us as to the 'how' of transforming this world & empowered us to do so.
- So often we hear people say they have not, or cannot, experience the presence of God, and therefore deny that God exists, or, as Marx would have it – is an illusion that dulls & comforts us in the pain of living.
- Today's readings show us that if you want to encounter God then you have to experience love - this is not an optional extra for the Christian life.
- As St John says, 'The one who says they love God, yet they hate their brother or sister, is a liar.'
- I have read somewhere & often quote it, that God's love doesn't drop out of the sky; it's made real by people who cannot do other than extend to others the love they know God has for them.
- So, it's not about waiting for God to fulfil his promise of embedding the values of God's kingdom/heaven in the world NOW and HERE.
- It means actively replacing anger, hatred & violence with peace-making, reconciling, loving, patience & gentleness – beginning where we are.
- I suspect that Peter wanted to escape from what we today experience here in Melbourne, in Ukraine, Russia, in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Colombia, Mexico & I can go on & on with countries where war is being currently waged – in fact, officially 22 countries in the world currently.
- But you might note that I first mentioned here in Melbourne.
- On our roads, outside of courts, in homes, people are acting out of anger & hatred, instances of which are ravenously devoured & then spewed out by our media that thrives on it & actually escalates anger, hatred & violence.
- We cannot be a Church on the mountain – above the mess of the world, dulling people's senses with a promise of heaven to come – we are to transform & transfigure the world.
- Our glimpse of God's glory on the mountain & of what heaven is like, is the motivation for us to promote here & now God's values, his vision & kingdom.