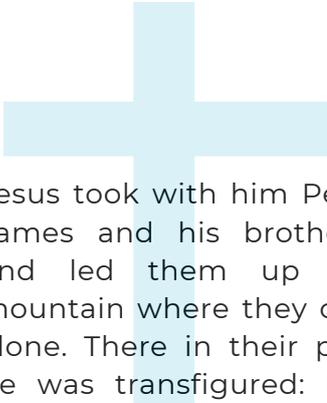


THIS WEEK'S GOSPEL

MATTHEW 17:1-9



Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud

covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them.

“ This is my Son,
the Beloved; he
enjoys my favour.
Listen to him. ”



Stand up,' he said 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain, Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'

AKBAR'S* STORY

Akbar, one of our refugee friends, fled persecution in his home country to seek asylum in the UK; but instead of safety, he was faced with more fear and suffering.*

In 2004, Akbar came to the UK to seek asylum after speaking to people he knew in his political party:

"So [I had to come to the UK] just to save my life and take refuge somewhere. It's been a long journey. They came to the UK, my ... our leader and top leadership.

They came to the UK, they claim Asylum and built a base here because you're not allowed any political activities in [my home country]. So I was in touch with a contact of my party and this was their decision, their policy [was] that if you can go abroad, you can come to UK."

Akbar claimed asylum in Croydon, South London, about a week after arriving in the UK:

"[It was] I think after six, seven days after I arrived because I wasn't aware how to claim Asylum.

It wasn't clear. It's not an easy thing to do, so I came here and I stayed with some party workers and they guide me how to claim Asylum."

Like most asylum seekers, Akbar now had a long wait for news of a decision on his case. He found out that a decision had been made in very stressful circumstances. While reporting to a Home Office official, as many asylum seekers have to do on a regular basis, he was told that his asylum claim had been refused:



“They said that my first application is refused. So I don't have any application pending, but they don't inform your solicitor, they didn't inform you in advance. When you go to signing they say 'Look, this is the decision, we are going to detain you'. It was a sudden shock. I have been detained twice, once for eight months and second time for two months.”

His ambitions and hopes were crushed by his experience of detention, which was traumatic, unsettling and painful:

“I was treated like a criminal. I saw a horrible things in there. Sometimes, when they wanted to deport, nobody wanted to go back to their country. One night when I was sleeping, they came at four o'clock, four men in riot gear. They wake up my cellmate and he was crying, he wasn't wanting to go but they dragged him out of the room and, by force, they took him to Afghanistan.”



It was an isolating experience. For Akbar, it was difficult even to connect with those around him who were in the same position:

“They always keep changing, people are coming and going but everybody's frightened. Everybody was just praying. I didn't see any life in anybody's face. It's like half dead people. Because they don't know what will happen next, the next moment people used to call suddenly, they give him that document. It's very, very hard. Very difficult.”

The UK is the only country in Europe that detains people indefinitely for immigration purposes, holding them in prison-like conditions. This has a very negative affect on the mental health of those who are detained:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Jesus is very obviously and dramatically transfigured in the Gospel passage. Do you think the disciples were 'transfigured' by this experience too? How?



Some commentators believe that the purpose of the transfiguration was to strengthen the disciples, so that they recognised Jesus even in his suffering and death. What memories and experiences have strengthened you in times of suffering?



The voice from the clouds says, 'This is my beloved Son: listen to him.' If you could speak to people like Akbar who are experiencing persecution or immigration detention, what would you say?



I offer up a prayer in my own words based on what God has revealed to me during this prayerful reflection.

“ I was treated like a criminal. I saw horrible things in there. ”

“Even prison is better than detention. There's a difference. Because if you go to prison, you expect - there's a trial going on. There is a possibility you are going to prison, you already made your plans, your house, your living, your things. But in detention, you don't know how long you will be there. I saw some people two years over there in detention centre. It's really very hard. And the fear of deportation is the biggest threat.”

**To protect his identity, this is not his real name.*