

St Mary's Concord

A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Lent

This reflection is based on the homily preached by Fr Paul Crowley on the readings for the Second Sunday of Lent in Year A: Genesis 12:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:1-8; Matthew 17:1-9

How do we find meaning in life? Viktor Frankl died in Vienna in 1997 at the age of 92. He was a survivor of the Nazi holocaust. After the war he returned to his career; he was a doctor and went on to become a leading psychotherapist. He is probably best known for his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, published in 1946.

The book was a reflection on his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. How can any human being find meaning in life when they are confronted by what seems to be a hopeless situation?

Reflecting on why he survived, he concluded that a key factor had been his ability to recall memories of happier times, of being with family and loved ones. Frankl's insight was that it is our human capacity to remember positive experiences from our past that enables us to have hope even in the midst of deprivation and death.

But to remember is not simply to recall the past. A photograph, an object or a place can help us to recall not only a person or an event but also a particular time or moment. Our memory is located in time and takes us back to the emotions and feelings we experienced at that time.

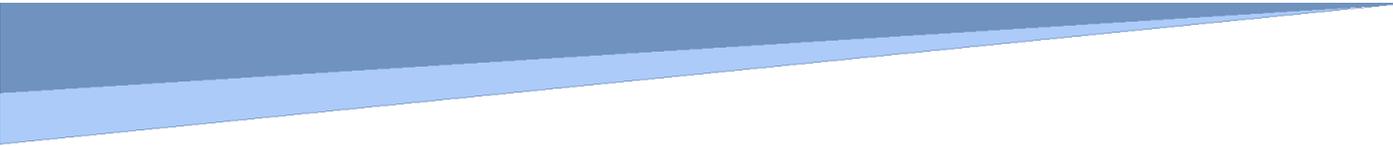
Sometimes, if those feelings were painful, the memory may trigger feelings of loss or grief. If we remember a past hurt, we may find ourselves feeling angry. We human beings often struggle to let go of the painful experiences of life. We keep going back and wishing we could change what happened, take back that hurtful word or reach out and respond in a more positive way.

People who have suffered some trauma often experience flash backs and nightmares. Therapists speak of the healing of memories. But memories aren't always negative.

For Viktor Frankl it was about making a deliberate choice to go back into those positive experiences of being surrounded by love. In our relationship with God, spiritual writers call those positive memories moments of consolation.

When we struggle to pray, when we question even the existence of God, we need to recall those moments in the past when we experienced God's presence. They are often fleeting but they bring a deep peace that can sustain us when we struggle with the day to day reality of living.

Today's Gospel, the scene that is usually called the Transfiguration, is about a moment of consolation for Peter, James and John. In Matthew's Gospel immediately before this scene, Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that their journey to Jerusalem will lead to his death. And immediately after they come



down from the mountain, they encounter a man who pleads with Jesus to heal his son, a scene of human suffering.

As they were coming down from the mountain Jesus gave Peter, James and John an order: “tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead”. When Matthew calls what happened on the mountain “a vision”, he is placing this story in a particular context. A vision in a biblical setting is not about what we do, it is about what God does. It is a moment when we are given a glimpse into the activity of God.

These moments of consolation are God’s gift to us. We are also being reminded that these moments are woven into the fabric of ordinary human life. They are there for all who have set out on this journey we call the Christian life, but we can easily miss them unless we are open to receive them.

Like Viktor Frankl we need to make a deliberate choice to remember them. Matthew wanted his community to remember that Jesus, the risen Lord, was with them and that is why he ends his Gospel with Jesus telling the disciples “I am with you always.”

Paul Crowley
8 March 2020