

**T**he gospels recount many miracles performed by Jesus in the course of His ministry, so many in fact that the potency of their message can become dulled or even misconstrued. Whilst Christ in His great compassion for those who suffer reached out to many to alleviate their physical pain, He did so with a greater purpose than merely to grant their desire for bodily health. He desired that the faith that first led them to Him would be invigorated just as their bodies had been healed, and that with physical health restored they might have the strength to seek the wellness of their souls in the journey of new life in Him. We see in today's reading how Simon's wife's mother leapt into service of the Lord after her fever had been cured, pointing to the desire of those touched by Christ to give of themselves to be used for His will. The Gospel of the day also speaks to us of the growing crowds seeking out the Lord, pointing to the significance of these miracles as witness to the power of God.

For us, as we hear the unfolding of these miracles that will culminate in the raising of Lazarus before Jesus makes his final journey to Jerusalem, we must first guard against apathy. These are not fanciful stories that are merely symbolic. They should not lose their power to amaze us just because we have heard it all before. We must seek to be inspired by the very hope of those that witnessed them in the flesh: a hope that God will be with us in our suffering to alleviate our pain; a hope that, beyond health of body, the Lord might heal our souls and enliven our faith; a hope that our whole lives may bear witness to the power of God's love for all mankind; and a hope that when our mortal flesh fails for the last time, it may be transformed by Christ for the next life, just as we conformed our soul to Christ in this life.

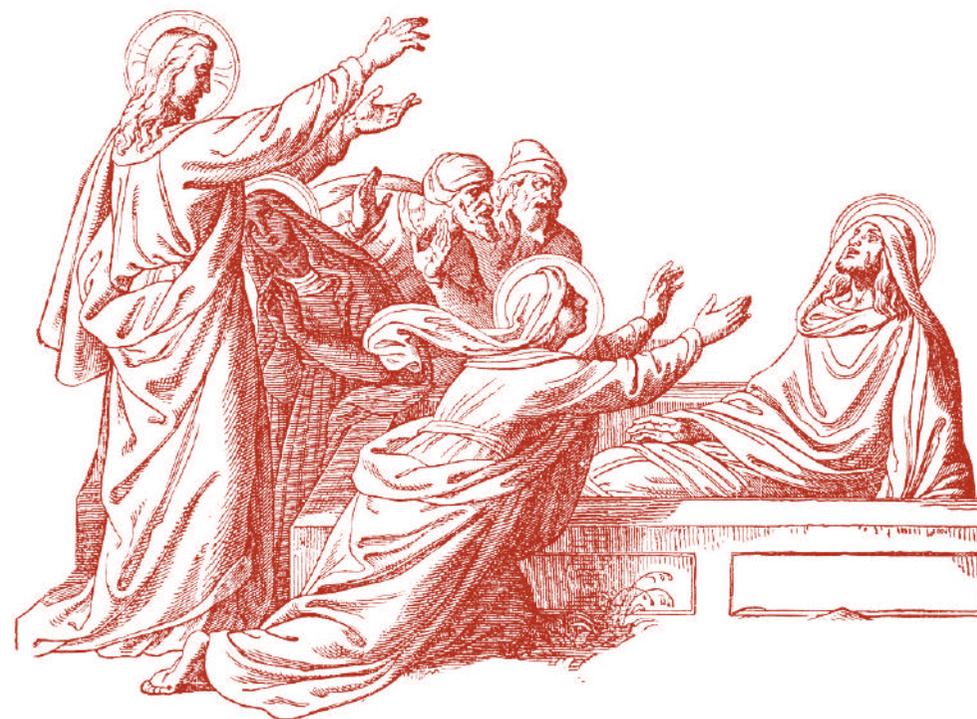
And in our disposition to prayer much may be learned from the miracles that took place in Capernaum. First and foremost among these is that faith must precede any request for divine assistance, and by this I mean not faith that God will grant your desire, but faith that He can and will always grant that which will lead you to deeper communion with His love. The second is to seek in all of life's situations, good or otherwise, that disposition in prayer that is ever thankful to God for the hope He gives, which should lead our temporal lives ever further along the path to eternity with Him. The third is sensitive discernment of how God answers your prayers. His response to our supplications may not always be our heart's desire but it will always be sure necessity for our salvation. Finally, in all things we should seek first our spiritual wellbeing, or, as Jesus taught concerning the many worries of this world, "Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:31-33) †

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **4th February 2018**  
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

# Newbec

NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

# In HOPE of Health



**W**e have been witnesses, these past few Sundays, to the miraculous works of the Lord as narrated by St. Mark. We have seen the great compassion that Jesus had for suffering humanity, and his desire to heal them from their ills. But we have also seen, through His teachings and His miracles, that all of these things pointed to a greater redemptive purpose. His desire was not, finally, to restore bodily health to the afflicted, but to restore life to those whom sin and death had claimed as their slaves.

For this purpose to be realised required a love for suffering humanity so great that it would not only desire to alleviate their pain but would willingly bear it all in His own flesh. This is the love to which every miraculous cure in the gospels points – a love so great that He would suffer and die for it. But for this act of redeeming love to take place, His true purpose must remain hidden until the appointed time. It is for this reason that we read in the gospels Jesus' repeated command to tell no one about the miracles that had been performed. As St. Paul explains, "We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8-9).

It is for this reason that Jesus taught in parables and instructed everyone, from unclean spirits and those healed of their illnesses, to his closest disciples, not to reveal anything that would disclose His identity. It would only be after His death that the light of the resurrection would pierce the veil of this 'Messianic secret' and the true meaning of His teaching and the final purpose of the miracles He performed would be understood. We can safely say that without the cross and resurrection, the years of Jesus' ministry can never be comprehended in their fullness, nor may we be said to be true followers of Christ unless we follow Him to the cross.

It is appropriate, therefore, that today's Gospel should be the last we hear before the start of our Lenten observance. It reminds us not to be among the hyped crowds who flocked to Jesus to witness His wonders, and later would greet Him with palms and hail him as king, only to shout "Crucify him!" a matter of days later. It reminds us to hope beyond the hype, to be more than fair weather Christians who are filled with zeal when the going is good but lapse into indifference and spiritual decay when more is demanded of us than we care to give. If only all those who had been there for the miracles would have been there for the cross, the crucifixion of the Son of God would not have been such a barren tableau.

And so as we prepare to enter the season of Lent, let us strengthen our hope for the days ahead. If our Lenten fast is to be truly a journey with Christ to the cross, one that denies self for the salvation of the other, we must hold fast to the hope that we have been given. For we live in the appointed time, in the age of salvation, and are privy to the Messianic secret that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word, Son of the living God, and that beyond the cross lies the tomb from which He rose from the dead to bring life to those who hope in His name. †

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **11th February 2018**  
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

# Newbec

NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH



**S**aint Mark's account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness may be the shortest among the synoptic gospels but it loses none of the magnitude of this significant event in the life of the Saviour. Jesus walked away from his tempter with a universal call to repentance and faith. He emerged from the desert a man with a profound, human experience of the wiles of Satan and an urgent message that resounds through the millennia to our own times. It is not a message of condemnation but one of profound compassion, for Satan and the temptations of the forces of evil abound, and the Lord Himself knows how formidably compelling they can be.

He comes to us from the desert not to judge but to redeem; and His is the calling of Lent, indeed, it is the calling of our whole lives: *Repent and embrace the Good News of your salvation from sin and death.*

*Turn to me and be saved* – this is the message of the Lord today. It really is that simple. He knows every one of our sins but counts them naught. He does not stand with a list of punishments for each of our transgressions. Instead, He says *come as you are; the just punishment for your sins I have already borne.* This is the essence of true faith – the emptying of ourselves, sins and all, in exchange for the love of God. And what a deal it is! For each sin, for which our immortal souls should wrench in guilt-ridden agony and for which we should rightly be condemned, the Lord offers unconditional pardon and peace.

If only we would turn. If only we would believe. If only we would accept the mercy that freely pours from the heart of our God. If only we could see Christ in the world around us and draw our strength from Him to resist the temptations of Satan.

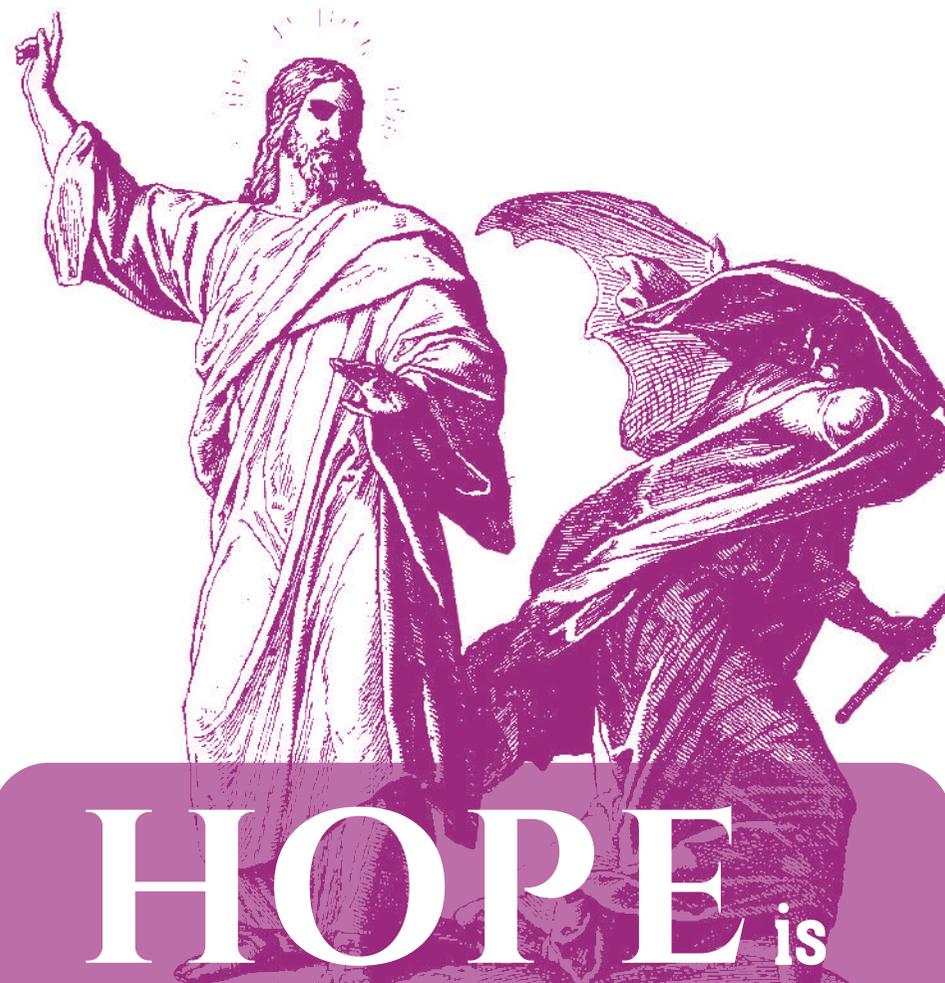
Hence the need for our Lenten fast: not as a punishment for our transgressions, but as tool with which to strengthen our resolve for God. Penance is never so much about paying for what we have done in the past, as it is about tempering ourselves in the refiner's fire to live differently than before and walk stronger in the faith. Many turn away from Christ and the Church for fear that the burden of their sins will bring condemnation. Others bury their sins in their darkened souls in the hope that the Lord will not see them. Both fail to appreciate the hope that this season offers, that Christ offers today and every day. For He has confronted Satan, and although he emerged victorious over the temptations the Evil One placed before Him, He knows both their power and human frailty in the face of them. He does not call us to conversion so that He can rebuke us, but so that He can tell us that there is a way out from the wilderness

At Midday Prayer throughout the season of Lent, we sing the antiphon, *"As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked man; rather let him turn from his evil way and live."* Let us turn, then, with true contrition and resolute hearts fortified by our Lenten penance, towards the Lord who is our guide through the wilderness of the world to the reward of eternal life with Him.†

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **18th February 2018**  
1st Sunday of Lent

# Newtbec

NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH



**HOPE** is  
Turning to HIM Who Saves

**W**hilst the *Transfiguration of The Lord* has a feast of its own on the sixth of August every year, the mystery is retold as a part of our Lenten preparation for celebrating the Paschal Triduum because of its important placement in the narrative of Christ's ministry, and for the hope its revelation provides for those that would accompany Christ on the way of the cross.

The Transfiguration occurs in all three synoptic gospels shortly after Peter's confession in response to Christ's question, "Who do you say I am?" Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," marking a turning point in Jesus' relationship with His disciples. No longer did they see Him as just 'teacher' or 'master', they acknowledged now that He was the long-awaited Messiah, the anointed one of God, the promised deliverer of God's people, Israel, as prophesied from of old. And yet, Jesus knew that they could not possibly comprehend the fullness of His and destiny of the Christ.

And so it was that at this time Jesus began to teach his disciples in earnest about His impending death, revealing the Messianic Secret that would upend their worldview of the Messiah and the meaning of redemption. The Transfiguration forms a part of this process of revelation: that Jesus is no ordinary man, indeed, no ordinary 'son of god' in the mortal sense; that Jesus is God Himself, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father who sent Him; that this God-made-man has come to be killed, for only through His death can man's slavery to death itself be ended; and that this God-made-man will rise again from the dead to restore life for all who would follow Him in faith to the Kingdom of His eternal glory. It was too much for His disciples to comprehend; and indeed they didn't, even as he was dragged away to be put to death, and even when the women among them rushed back with the shocking news of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. And yet these same disciples have given us their testimony, for they *"have seen His glory; the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn. 1:14). And their testament is sacred witness to the Messianic Secret they came to understand; a truth that they share with us so that we might never doubt the salvation wrought for us by Christ.

We have the privilege of seeing through the eyes of the enlightened. Thus in the revelation of His glory on the night of His Transfiguration, be of no doubt that the voice of the Father speaks directly to each of us: *"This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him."* (Mk. 9:7)

It is too easy for us to get caught up in the anticipation of the joy of Easter without truly listening to Christ on the journey to His death in Jerusalem. Just as there is no Easter without Lent, so too is it easy for us to forget that the victory of Christ at Easter lies not on the mountaintop of the Transfiguration but on the hill of Golgotha.

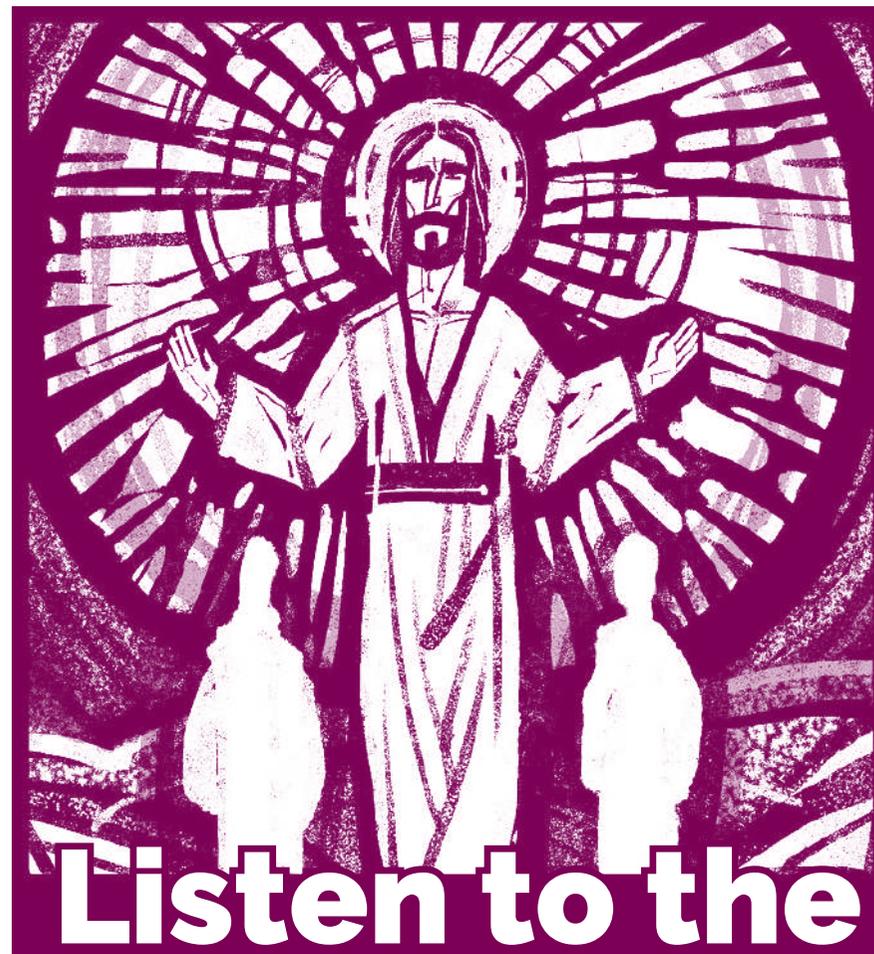
As we journey through Lent, then, let us listen to the teaching of Christ and bear witness with His disciples to His call to take up our crosses daily and follow him on the Way of the Cross; for the nature of the glory that Christ shares with us was wrought at a price. The Transfiguration should fortify our spirits as we bear the crosses we have been given in this life; the vision of His glory becoming for us an antidote for discouragement. It is in the light of His glory today that we can appreciate how our participation in the suffering of Christ is a participation in His redemptive work for ourselves and all who would turn to Him in love. In the words of Pope St. Leo the Great:

*"Thus, the Lord's example calls on the faith of believers to understand that, no doubt against the promise of happiness, we must nevertheless, in the trials of this life, ask for patience before glory; the happiness of the kingdom cannot, in fact, precede the time of suffering."* (Leo the Great, Sermon 38,4) †

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **25 February 2018**  
2nd Sunday of Lent

# Newtbec

NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH



# Listen to the Voice of Hope