



## **Eighteenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006**

**Daniel 7:9-14    2 Peter 1:16-19    Mark 9:2-10**

The Gospel today speaks of Jesus transfigured.

It is a vision story and the church places it before us in the context of the visions from the book of Daniel. We know that the bible is a collection of books and we also know that many different types of writing are represented: for example, poetry, tribal tales, lamentations, collections of wise sayings and others. The type that is a little difficult to understand is called, apocalyptic.

If you asked someone today to classify it, the closest they'd get would be to call the style "science fiction" or "fantasy". There are shelves full of such writing in bookshops and libraries. Apocalyptic writing comes into its own in times of distress and confusion.

You would have noticed an increase in pseudo-prophetic writing around the time of the millennium. If things become difficult in our lives we are tempted to look for answers in prophecy. Now let us consider Daniel's vision, especially this extract from the dream of the Four Beasts.

The Four Beasts go through a series of transformations.

The Ancient One, a symbol for God, takes the throne in the midst of this terrifying scene. The Ancient One is all in white from hair to clothing and the throne is surrounded by fire. Myriads attend him.

Another figure appears, like an ordinary man, When this man is presented to the Ancient One he is transformed. He is elevated from his lowly status by being given permanent authority over the world.

For Daniel, the four beasts represented great nations that would be in conflict tearing each other to pieces. Harmony would come through a person authorised by God to bring peoples together. This kind of scenario is popular, and throughout history we can see where examples of this have occurred. For the early Christians, Jesus was the ultimate "son of man". Their times were just as difficult as Daniel's time and they knew that God would not abandon them. An ordinary man seemed to promise that the world could be restored, not through power, but through reconciliation among peoples.

When we read the Gospel story of the transfiguration, we hear echoes of the Daniel story but with important differences. The "ordinary" man is not just in the presence of the Ancient One but is in the place of the Ancient One. It is Jesus who appears in white. Jesus is not threatened by savage monsters but is in peaceful conversation with significant figures from the past who have experienced a spiritual transformation from "ordinary" to servants of God.

The followers of Jesus recognise that, through Jesus, son of man, and son of God, all are called to play a role in the transformation of the world.

God's authority is Jesus' authority, through the unique relationship that we call Trinity.

The writing given to us under the name of Peter has as its focus the unknown time of the fulfilment which is referred to as the second coming. The passage of time was making the community re-assess their original understanding of this concept.

The writer has Peter speaking of his approaching death, so the message is a kind of testimony. He reiterates the foundational truth that Jesus is of God. He warns of the dangers of people taking prophetic statements from the scriptures and using them as personal messages. Prophetic messages are directed to the community and need to be interpreted by the community.

“Attend to the prophecies as you would to a lamp in the darkness, but once the daystar rises in your hearts you have no need of the lamp.”

Patricia Stevenson rsj.