

KEEPING OUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS THROUGH LENT

Gen. 15:5-12, 17-18; Phil. 3:17-4:1 & Lk. 9:28-36

How often at the beginning of the New Year or at the beginning of Lent we have made what we thought was a good resolution. We launched into it with great enthusiasm, but very soon we find it difficult to keep up the momentum and we give it up.

This may be happening to us today as we move into the second week of Lent. So, the Church gives us the glorious Transfiguration of Jesus to remind us of the prize that awaits us if we persevere with our resolutions. Just as Our Lord gave His Apostles - Peter, James and John - this privileged vision of His glory to strengthen them to face the imminent scandal of His brutal passion, so also we are given this reading today to encourage us to keep up our Lenten practices of prayer, penance, almsgiving and charitable works because these are the means by which we atone for our sins.

This event which took place on Mount Tabor shows Jesus, Who is truly human, to be truly divine. His divine glory is seen shining in His face. The two Old Testament figures on the scene are Moses, representing the Law which was given to him by God, and Elijah the first prophet of Israel who represents all the prophets through whom God has spoken. Both men are pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Moses and Elijah were talking about the "passing" which Our Lord was to accomplish in Jerusalem, a reference to His Passion, Death and Resurrection for the salvation of humanity. At the Transfiguration, as at the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus receives the testimony of both God His Father and God the Holy Spirit. The First Person of the Blessed Trinity was heard to say, "This is My Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him." The presence of the Third Person was signified by the bright cloud which overshadowed them.

At that unique moment in human history the three Apostles are in the presence of the Blessed Trinity as each one of us will be at the moment of our death when our lives are judged and we are found to be worthy or not, of Heaven for all eternity. What was Peter's reaction to all this? He is so happy that he never wants it to end. He immediately starts making plans to stay there! [We too today witness this manifestation of Jesus' glory](#) to keep us strong and faithful to Him on our journey through life. God gives us a glimpse of our potential future glory and the reward that awaits us if we are true to Him.

We have not been left to make this journey on our own. The main spiritual sustenance Jesus has provided to feed our souls is the result of His sacrifice. We can observe these twin elements, of sacrifice and reward, in all three of today's readings. In the Old Testament passage, God asks Abraham to look at the sky and then promises a posterity as numerous as the stars. Once Abraham accepts God's word in faith, God seals His promise by a sacrifice of young animals at sunset. This story is a prophecy of the glory of the risen Christ and the Sacrifice offered of Himself on Calvary. Both took place in the afternoon, and Abraham's sheep is symbolic of Christ's death on the Cross.

The Gospel account of the Transfiguration thus offers Peter, James and John a fleeting vision of Our Lord's future glory, and this vision is sealed by the

testimony of the Father, and the presence of Moses and Elijah to the Passover sacrifice which Christ was to offer of Himself.

In the Second Reading, Saint Paul exhorts the Philippians, and indeed all of us, to keep our eyes fixed on our goal in Heaven, contemplating the glory of Christ and our own destiny to share in this glory. By doing so, we will receive the strength to live by our faith and to offer up our daily sacrifices - our physical failings, our mental stresses, our setbacks and frustrations - in union with the suffering of Christ.

Being aware of these truths should help us persevere with the Lenten penances we have set ourselves to do. It should also be a source of joy to us as we contemplate our eternal homeland in Heaven - a prize on which we must keep our eyes fixed as we journey through the temptations of this world.

Holy Trinity, help us to be the persons You want us to be. When we stand before You on our Judgment Day may our lives be acceptable to You.

WHEN WE NEED HELP

Lk. 9:28-36

Peter is a young man in his early forties. He is intelligent and well-educated. He works as a research scientist in the field of ecology. His friends say he is gentle and kind and mixes well with people, but he has a problem. He is an alcoholic. His drinking takes the form of binges. Most of the time he does not drink at all, but when he does, the result is almost always the same. He gets drunk and stays that way for several days. For all of his good qualities, the most obvious thing about Peter is that he needs help.

Sally was a little five-year-old girl. She got sick in the middle of the night. It was not terribly serious, an upset stomach, accompanied by a slight fever. Her mother is up most of the night, changing her bed and her clothes, and comforting her. By morning she feels better. She needs help.

Anna is an old woman in her late eighties. She lives in a nursing home. Her husband of more than sixty years is dead. She is still somewhat mobile, moving about with little shuffling steps, but she can no longer shop, or cook, or keep house, or do any of the things that daily living requires. Often, she does not know what time of the day it is. Anna has lived long and well, but now she needs help.

Dip into life wherever we will - at the beginning, at the end, or in the middle - one thing we will always find is people needing help. What is true of Peter and Sally and Anna is also true of you and me. Our needs may not be quite as obvious as those of an alcoholic, or a small child, or an old woman, but they are just as real. None of us is strong enough to handle the challenge of living alone. Every one of us needs help.

Think your way through one ordinary day, and make a list of the things that you can do without help. Your list will not be very long. I tried it. The first one seemed easy. I can get up, take a shower, and get dressed all by myself. But what happens when the shower does not work and the heating fails? Then I am in trouble. My only hope is to call the plumber or electrician. I need help.

I can make a piece of toast and a cup of coffee all by myself. So, I put that on my list. But then I thought of the people who grow the wheat, and grind the flour, and bake the bread. I could not make my own breakfast without their help. So, I had to mark that off my list. Then I get into my van and drive to the convent to say Mass. If my van will not start, the only thing I know to do is call a mechanic. I cannot get to convent without his help.

The plain truth is that you and I do not and, probably, cannot function alone, even in the most mundane matters of life. In the deeper and more profound areas, our dependence becomes even more obvious. When our hearts are breaking until the pain is almost unbearable, we need help. When the flame of faith is flickering and seems about to go out, we need help. When discouragement surrounds us and hope is hard to find, we need help.

Jesus stood at one of those critical junctures of life. He was aware He was going to die. He was on His way to Jerusalem and He knew that He would not get out alive. In a very short time, perhaps two or three weeks, He was going to die a horrible death. That was a bitter pill for a young man to swallow. Jesus needed help, just as we do. Our Gospel reading for today tells us how to find it.

The first thing is to admit our need. Some people are reluctant to do that. They think that needing help is a sign of weakness, but the truth is that knowing our need is a sign of greatness. A barnacle on the bottom of a boat does not need much to survive. He is a tiny little animal and all he needs is a surrounding of salt water and a bit of food. A dog stands higher in the scale of life. He needs food, and water, and a ball to chase, and a pat on the head. Give him these, and he can live contentedly. You and I need more. We need books and music. We need a job to do, a challenge to meet, and a reason for living. We must never be afraid to admit our need. It is a sign of our kinship with Christ.

The next thing is to accept the help we need. We can find it in the same way Jesus did. He took with Him His best friends, and sought out a quiet place to pray. Both of those are sources of help in times of need. I heard about a man who was giving the eulogy at the funeral of his father. He stood at the altar steps and looked into the faces of scores of friends. Suddenly, he found himself saying this, "Thank you for your presence. It helps just to know that you care. It does not really change anything. Dad is still dead. The future still has to be handled. I am not sure how it helps, but it does, just to know that you care." In times of need, we can turn to our friends. Their presence will help.

Also, we can use our faith. Jesus also prayed. At His Transfiguration He knew His cruel death was approaching. He prayed to His Father to help Him. He received the help He needed. I heard about another man who was a recovering alcoholic. At one point, he was drinking a bottle of whisky a day, but he quit and became a useful citizen. A friend asked him how and he told a remarkable story. One evening he was alone in his little flat, getting drunk like he did every night. Then for some reason, he sat back in his chair and said this simple prayer, "Dear Lord, I am killing myself and I cannot stop. Please, help me, or else I am a goner." Then he got up from his chair, went to the sink, and poured out the rest of his bottle. Five years later, he still had not taken a drink. I am not saying that it will work that readily for you and me, but I am saying that faith in God has helped others. It helped Jesus and I have reason to believe that it will do the same for you and me. When we need help, the place to turn is to our faith and to our friends.

Lord Jesus, thank you for all I am able to do. But let me remember there are times when I do need help. May I turn to You and my friends, and then trust that I shall get the help I need.

HEAVENLY HELP IS AT HARD WHEN TIMES ARE HARD

Lk. 9:28-36

Are you going through a hard time? Are you fearful of the future and lack the strength to face it? Do you feel alone? If the answer to all these questions is yes, I hope you will find all the help you need from today's Gospel. If, on the other hand, life is going well for you at this moment come along with the Lord to the Mount of Transfiguration because suffering of one sort or another is sure to overtake you. Jesus climbed this mountain, like every mountain He faced, to show us how to endure suffering. He set the trail and showed us how to follow.

At this moment of His life things weren't going smoothly for Jesus. His enemies were beginning to group together and plot His death. He was aware a storm was brewing. His death was approaching. He had to prepare for the dark days that lay ahead. He always did this by prayer and solitude. He took with Him Peter, James and John, His inner circle of friends. He knew that this moment would in some way help them too to prepare for His approaching death. This thought is expressed so well in the Preface of today's Mass. "He foretold His death to His disciples and showed them His glory on the holy mountain, so that the law and the prophets might confirm that the path of suffering leads to the glory of the Resurrection." His Apostles too needed rest from the labours of the valley below. He brought them halfway to Heaven, not for the view of the valley, but for the view of the sky. While they slept through fatigue, Heaven descended on Jesus. Imagine the surprise they got when they awoke and saw Jesus' face had changed. It was bathed in light and His clothing was certainly brilliant white and Moses and Elijah were talking to Him. These two men were the two great heroes of the Old Testament. Luke tells us that they were speaking with Jesus about His passing, which He was soon to accomplish in Jerusalem. What an incredible moment it was for the Apostles to witness. Jesus who was the fulfilment of the Law speaking with Moses to whom the Law had been given; and Jesus who was the great Prophet speaking with Elijah about death! These two men represented the best of the Old Testament story. What an encouragement they must have been to Jesus as He prepared for His own death. Of course, for Jesus there would be no fiery chariot to whisk Him from the clutches of death like Elijah, and no tender death into the embrace of God like Moses. He would die on a cross on the hill of the Skull in the darkness of Calvary praying to a God who had appeared to have forsaken Him.

Despite the fact that Jesus was surrounded by hostile forces, an uncertain public following and sleeping Apostles, He drew strength from the knowledge that He was in fact connected to a heavenly community of support. It appears that it was in solitude that Jesus found strength. After the fasting and temptations in the wilderness, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and here on the mount of Transfiguration, the community of Heaven enveloped Jesus and gave Him strength. The Transfiguration was a temporary drawing back of the curtain of the Apostles' blindness to reveal the glory that sustained and guided Jesus. This experience encouraged Jesus in His preparation for death, for that day when Heaven would be silent. In that lonely time, He could draw on this experience to sustain Him through His darkest hour.

How easily Jesus might have clung to this precious moment of intimacy with His Father rather than leave the mountain for what lay ahead of Him when He would experience being forsaken by His Father. How tempting to join Moses and Elijah back to Heaven. Such was the thought behind Peter's words. "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so, let us make three tents, one for you, one of Moses and one for Elijah." Peter meant well. He was so happy that he never wanted it to end. If Peter had known that the Father was about to speak, he would have remained silent as such a solemn moment. It was then that from the cloud they heard, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to Him." All that the Father demanded from these three Apostles was to listen. After the voice had spoken, they saw Jesus all alone.

Jesus did not stay on the mountain of Transfiguration. He was now strengthened to descend to the valley of mission to continue the journey to the Cross.

Lord Jesus, there are two things we can learn from this incident. Firstly, just as You experienced the presence of Heaven before the storm, we must remember that when we have to suffer or we find ourselves in spiritual darkness we are not alone we have heavenly help at hand. Secondly, let us obey our Heavenly Father and listen attentively to You, for we have Your words to help us through life. Your presence will never leave us.

JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

Lk. 9:28-36

When I visited Mount Tabor for the first time it was in the evening and in all my life, I have never witnessed such a red, orange glowing sunset. That sunset made it so easy for me to imagine what happened on that mountain over two thousand years ago.

The reason why Jesus took Peter, James and John to the top of the mountain was to show them Who He really was – not just a great prophet, but God's own Son. Because Jesus is God He is always surrounded with radiant light, but when He became Man, He concealed that light. Today He allowed His three Apostles to see this light. He did this for two reasons. Six days ago, Peter had declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now He was revealing His glory, to him. Also, very shortly He was going to meet His death and His Apostles would find this very hard to accept. This revelation of His glory was to help them not to lose heart in Whom He really is.

This event has something in common with His Agony in the Garden. On both occasions Jesus took the same three Apostles; He took them so that they could be alone and pray; on both occasions the Apostles fell asleep. There was one great difference. On Mount Tabor He manifested the radiant glory of His Godhead and in the Garden, He revealed His Manhood. He showed He was really frightened at the ordeal He was soon to face.

On Mount Tabor Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. Why these two? Moses represented the Law. God gave him the Law on two tablets of stone. Elijah represented the Prophets. Their appearances were to tell us that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus Himself said, "I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them." (Mt. 5:17). The Father's voice was heard singling out Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah who possessed Divine Authority.

When Peter suggested erecting three tents, he was so filled with joy that he wanted to keep Moses and Elijah with them, but this was not what God wanted. Peter's desire to build three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah may also show his understanding that real faith is built on three cornerstones: the Law, the Prophets and Jesus. Peter was to grow in his understanding and one day he would write of Jesus as the 'chief cornerstone.' (1 Peter 2:6)

Peter, James and John experienced a wonderful moment on the mountain, and they didn't want to leave. All of us at some time have had that joyful mountain top experience. It may be a beautiful friendship or the view of a glorious sunset. We should hold on to them in our memory and recall them in moments of desolation so that we know God is with us and we shall one day share His glory, the glory He displayed on this occasion.

When we enjoy such an inspiring experience we want to stay where we are and never want it to end, away from the reality and problems of our daily lives. Knowing that struggles await us in the valley encourages us to linger on the mountain top. But staying on the mountain prohibits our ministering to others. Instead of becoming spiritual giants, we would soon be dwarfed by our own self-centredness. We need to have that right balance in life, times for retreat and renewal and then with our new gained strength to return to world and minister to it.

Lord Jesus, today, God our Father clearly identified You as His Son and He tells us to listen to You. May we be always ready to listen to what You have to teach us. We also pray that those who do not know You may receive the grace to recognise You as God's Son and listen to You.

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WHEN AFRAID OF THE FUTURE

Lk. 9:28-36

Are you afraid of the future? Do you feel unable to cope with the future? Do you feel alone? If the answer to these questions is yes, then let the story of the Transfiguration give you courage. Jesus climbed this mountain to show us how to cope with our uncertain future.

When Jesus climbed Mount Tabor His life was in danger. His enemies were plotting not only to silence but to kill Him. When Jesus is in a situation like this He retreats and spends time in prayer, quietness and solitude.

Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John up the mountain. When they got to the top He prayed, but they gave into their exhaustion and fell asleep. I'm not surprised because the climb to Mount Tabor is a stiff one. Jesus I'm sure was also tired, but He saw the need to keep awake and pray. He had brought them halfway to heaven; not for the view of the valley, and I can assure you that it is worth seeing for I have been there, but for the view of the sky. While they slept, Heaven descended on Jesus. When the Apostles awoke, they saw Jesus in glory.

Jesus climbed this mountain to be aware that He was the beloved Son of God and that His mission mattered to His Father. This is what we must do when we are buffeted by an uncertain future. We have got to know who we are, and why we are here and what we are about. Jesus had to stay focused on God's love for Him. Just as the heavenly voice confirmed that He was the beloved Son of the Father at His baptism, so too did the same voice confirm this on the mountain of Transfiguration. "This is My Son." This awareness is the key to Jesus' successful mission. It should also be the key to ours. At our baptism we were declared a child of God and during the course of our lives we need to remind ourselves who we are. No matter how the world may wish to regard us, we should never abandon the title we received at our baptism. We are the beloved sons and daughters of God. This is the only real truth about ourselves. This is not only a faith that we can hold on to; it is a faith which holds us in time of trial.

Jesus also climbed this mountain to be reminded that He was not alone. Despite the fact that He was surrounded by hostile forces: some members of His family thought He was going mad, an uncertain public following, and sleeping disciples, He drew strength from the knowledge that He was not alone. He was in touch with a heavenly community that supported Him. It is solitude that strengthens this sense of communion with the saints and with God. It is when we surround ourselves with the distraction of constant noise and constant company that we feel most exhausted in spirit, and most vulnerable to loneliness. This was not so with Jesus. Many times, the legions of angels and saints were invisible to the eye and silent to the ear, but they ministered to Jesus nonetheless. After the temptation in the desert, at the garden of Gethsemane, now on the mount of Transfiguration, the community of Heaven enveloped Jesus and gave Him strength. This experience was intended to encourage Jesus in His preparation for death, for that day when the heavens would be silent and He would endure the day of darkness. It would be then that Jesus would draw on experiences as these to sustain Him in His mission.

When the Apostles awoke, they saw Jesus flanked by Moses and Elijah, the two great heroes of the Old Testament. Luke tells us that they were speaking with Jesus about His death. This was the encouragement Jesus needed as He prepared for death. There would be no fiery chariot to whisk Him from death like Elijah had, nor would He depart this world quietly as did Moses. His death would be in the darkness of Calvary and praying to a God who seemed to have abandoned Him.

We must believe that even if we feel alone, we are not. As a child of God, our life is connected to the stream of saints who have gone before us. We cannot see them, we cannot hear them, but all those who have taken the journey with Christ through the dark tunnels of life and death are our companions.

Finally, Jesus allowed the mystery of this moment to be an inspiration to continue His mission and not to cling to it. How easily Jesus could have clung to this precious moment of intimacy with the Father rather than leave the mountain for a season of His Father's silence. How tempting it was to join Moses and Elijah back to Heaven and avoid His passion. Such was the thought behind Peter's thoughtless words, "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so, let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Peter meant well, but it would have been better for him to remain silent at such a solemn moment. It is at such a moment that we should be listening as the heavenly voice directed.

Jesus did not stay on the mountain of Transfiguration. His experience had encouraged Him to descend to the valley of mission and to continue the journey towards the Cross. God had given Him the light needed to face the darkness, and to find His way through the darkness.

Lord Jesus, when we have to face a hard and fearful future let us remember that we should retreat for a time to be alone with God in prayer and remind ourselves that we are God's children and we are not alone, we are surrounded by the saints who will indeed transform us.

GLIMPSES OF THE BEYOND

Mt. 17:1-9

How fortunate the Apostles Peter, James and John were! The three of them were chosen by Jesus to be taken up Mount Tabor - and they saw Him transfigured. But we shall have to wait until we reach Heaven to know why the other nine were not given the privilege of being present at this momentous event! In the Preface of the Transfiguration Mass we are told that Jesus took them up the mountain "to manifest to them His glory, to show, even by the testimony of the law and the prophets, that the Passion leads to the glory of the Resurrection."

Throughout the Bible the idea of Faith involves at least some things that cannot be seen. It is partially defined, therefore, as trusting in what we cannot see. We see this faith exercised by Abraham, when God said to him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Granted, God promised to make of him a great nation, to make his name great, and to protect him, but Abraham was leaving everything he had ever known, not knowing what lay ahead. And he was seventy-five years old! It is no wonder that Abraham became the enduring example of faith and was called "the father of faith."

Another example, from the New Testament, is in 2 Timothy when Paul encourages him to rely on the power of God and on Jesus Christ, "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." In other words, Timothy was being encouraged to have faith, not just in the testimonies of other believers, but in the glorious future made known in Jesus Christ.

These are just two of the many Biblical examples of faith that have an unfinished and future dimension to them. The God who is our Creator and Redeemer prepares a transcendent future for the faithful ... that eyes have not seen, nor ears heard. Today we share this perspective.

For despite the goodness of all that has been revealed by the prophets, the life of Jesus Himself and the teaching authority of the Catholic Church for 2,000 years we, too, await a full and final manifestation of God's glory. These three Apostles had come to know Jesus better than we ever could and yet, as is clear from the Gospel account, what they saw and heard was beyond anything they had known or contemplated. And they wanted to stay where they were in the hope that the experience would last forever.

What happened was that Jesus went with Peter, James and John up Mount Tabor to pray - and the most amazing thing occurred. Jesus is transformed into an otherworldly reality, His face shining like the sun and His clothes

dazzling white. Then long-dead Moses and Elijah appear talking with Him. A voice from Heaven says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased; listen to Him!" Then it ended and Jesus tells them not to mention what happened to anyone until after His death.

What seems obvious is that Moses and Elijah personify the two major streams of Old Testament tradition: the Law and the Prophets. The fact that Jesus is the central figure is clearly intended to show both His relation to Moses and Elijah, and His superiority to them. The Transfiguration lasted only moments, but it revealed what was ultimately true about Jesus and about the biblical history now fulfilled in Him.

Knowing what we know now the Transfiguration was both timely and understandable. Jesus had just blessed Peter's confession of faith as the foundation rock of His coming church, and told the disciples of His approaching death - and it was obviously intended to strengthen them and inspire them as the events of the Passover weekend unfolded. Writing his Gospel as an old man many years later Saint John wrote, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father". Clearly the Transfiguration was a glimpse of the beyond.

Not surprisingly, it was far beyond their own experiences, however, for when God spoke, they fell face down on the ground in fear. That is how we would react, too, if we did not receive Him under the appearance of a simple wafer of bread in Holy Communion but had to approach Him at the altar, shining brightly like the morning sun and dressed in garments glistening intensely white. God humbled Himself by becoming Man and being born in a stable 2,000 years ago - and He humbles Himself at every Mass so that we might come to know Him by receiving the spiritual food that our souls need to sustain us as His disciples in a pagan world.

Holy Spirit, give us the knowledge and understanding that will inspire us to realise that it is not God's reluctance to reveal more of Himself to us, but our failure to see more deeply into the things we take for granted.