

Chaplain's Bulletin March 5, 2023



Dear Folks,

Today our Gospel talks about the Transfiguration.

The Bible looks at mountains as a place to encounter God and especially receive instruction. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and, while you are there, I will give you the stone tablets on which I have written the commandments for their instruction’, Exodus (24:12). We remember he also goes back up the mountain for backup copies after Moses smashes the originals in response to the Golden Calf business (Exodus 34). Elijah gets marching orders on Mount Horeb (Mount Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai) in 1 Kings (19:8). Isaiah prophesied that “the mountain of the Lord’s house” will be a place of instruction (see Isaiah 2:2-3). Jesus goes up the mountain to give the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1).

We see that Jesus only takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain. It appears that not all disciples are equal, and certain gifts are given to some and not others. Galatians 2:9 tells us that Peter (“Cephas” is Aramaic for “rock”), James, and John were considered the “pillars” of the early Church. We see that they get special moments with Jesus, but we also see particular stories of their failures. Only Peter, James, and John were brought to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:37). Peter gets out of the boat when Jesus is walking on water (score one for him), but his faith wavers and he fails (Mat 14:28-31). Jesus rebukes James and John for wanting to call down fire on an inhospitable Samaritan town (Luke 9:54-55). Right after the third prediction of the passion (!) James and John want the best seats next to Jesus in the Kingdom (Mat 20:28). They still didn’t get it. We all remember Peter’s denial of Jesus three times on Good Friday (Mat 26:69-75). Peter, James, and John are the three that Jesus takes with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46), and they fall asleep. Once again, they fail.

We learn that some gifts and some spiritual experiences are given to some but not others. If we see others getting things we didn’t get, we have no cause to be jealous: they don’t necessarily have an easier road. We have no cause to be ashamed either: it doesn’t mean we have failed. If we get some great mystical experience or some great gift, we have no cause to be proud: we didn’t earn it. We just follow Jesus however we can (see John 21:18-23).

What is this great instruction that is given on this great occasion? First of all, it is the appearance of Jesus Himself, shining like the sun and clothes unnaturally white (Mat 17:2). A voice from the cloud says, “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him (Matthew 17:5).” That’s it. The great revelation is Jesus Himself. He is the new Torah, the new Law, the great revelation of God, the way to live in covenant with God.

How does this fit into our Lenten journey? During Lent, we want to focus especially on Jesus. We can spend extra time reflecting on the Gospels. We can spend extra time before the Blessed Sacrament. We can spend extra time reflecting on Jesus’ presence in the midst of our activities through the week, as we try to make what we do acceptable gifts to offer through Him. However important we thought Jesus was, He’s more important than that.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim