

Second Sunday of Lent

Year A

Gen 12:1-4a

Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

II Tim 1:8b-10

Mt 17:1-9

Michael F. DiGregorio, O.S.A.

Surely the experience of Peter, James and John as recounted in the Gospel today stood out for the remainder of their lives as an altogether unique and privileged moment in their relationship with Jesus. In both a literal and figurative sense, it was a peak experience for them. Just why Jesus led them up the mountain top may not have been altogether clear to the three apostles for a long time after, and becomes clear to you and me today only if we see this experience of theirs in the wider context of their association with Jesus.

If you were to go to the Bible and open it to the Gospel of Saint Mark, looking for this passage, you would find it in Ch. 9, beginning with verse 2. There you would notice that three words have been omitted from our reading today, the first three words, three very important words which show that this mountain top experience was, in the mind of Mark, connected to what he had written before. **“Six days later,”** Mark begins, “Jesus took Peter, James & John & led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.” The transfiguration occurs six days after Jesus had made the first prediction about his passion & death; six days after he had told Peter to get out of his sight & called him Satan for swearing to protect him from death; six days after he had announced that anyone who wanted to be his disciple would have to take up the cross & follow him!

We can only imagine what the mood of the twelve was after that conversation – we can imagine on the basis of our own reaction to the message of suffering and death and the cross. Not easy words to swallow, not an attractive picture of what the future would hold for them. “What have we gotten ourselves into?” they must have asked! “Where is all this going to lead?” Perhaps Jesus noticed that three of them, Peter, James and John, were the ones most affected, most shaken by all this talk? And so he took them apart by themselves and led them up a high mountain and there allowed them to see him in the fullness of his glory and to hear the confirmation that would reassure them and give them confidence for the difficult path ahead, “This is my beloved Son, listen to him.”

Peter loved the experience on the mountain top, he wanted to stay there forever. Presumably James and John were very deeply touched also. How we might wish that we could have such an experience – that would surely change our lives, keep us convinced, reassure us in our trials. “It would certainly convince the unbelievers and the lax” we would say! Everyone would believe! But would they?? Would anything really change? Remember that two of the three who witnessed this event later abandoned Jesus in his hour of darkness. Peter denied him – not once, but three times. The desertion & the denial were gut reactions to danger – our first instinct is self-preservation. The memory of the mountain top may have saved them and brought them back. It may be, also, what kept John there so faithfully at the foot of the cross through it all.

There are moments in your life and mine – privileged moments of grace, peak experiences of faith, of awareness, of enlightenment – in which we grasp the truth of something with the whole of our being, or better perhaps, are grasped by it and drawn into it – a moment of authentic self-giving, of total and absolute surrender, in which, as Saint Augustine says, “for one fleeting instant we reach out and touch Wisdom” [Conf. IX, 10 *paraphrased*]. These moments do not come often and when they do they must be recognized as the greatest of gifts and cherished and stored away in a very safe spot in our heart’s memory. When the difficulties come and trials beset us and temptation is all around, these are the things we go back to – and we do as the voice from the cloud instructs: we listen. For there is our Truth!