

[Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18](#)

[Ps 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19](#)

[Rom 8:31b-34](#)

[Mk 9:2-10](#)

Francis J. Doyle, O.S.A.

The recent death of Coretta Scott King has rekindled the memory and legacy of her husband, the devoted civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who in 1968 was assassinated in Memphis, TN. Shortly before he was gunned down, this winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace gave a powerful keynote address in which he said, “We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop....Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And he’s allowed me to go up to the mountain....Mine eyes have seen the glory of the Lord.”

Today’s Gospel brings us to a mountaintop, the mount of Jesus’ transfiguration where his glory was revealed. High mountains were traditional sites where biblical people often met their God. Clouds that may have encircled these peaks were seen as signs of God’s presence. It is sometimes said that even the structure of Mark’s Gospel from which we read today is like a mountain. As we go up one side, we hear about the ministry of Jesus; the miracles, the healings, the feeding of the thousands, the call of the disciples. The top of the mountain is Peter’s declaration, “You are the Christ”, and the revelation of Jesus’ glory at the transfiguration. And then, the disciples and Jesus come down the other side of the mountain toward the cross and some difficult days ahead.

Whenever the Gospels tell us that Jesus took his disciples “apart by themselves”, we know that some very special revelation is about to happen. Lent is somewhat like that for us. We’ve been called to come apart by ourselves to steal a quiet moment in our all too busy lives to listen to what the Lord wishes to reveal to us and what he desires us to see and know about ourselves. Peter wants to “freeze frame” this special moment by building three tents. These tents might bring to mind the desert journey of the Israelites who were tent dwellers. They made this journey when God chose to deliver them from slavery and lead them on their long arduous journey to freedom. On this journey God continuously revealed himself and transfigured moments of struggle into moments when he would assure them that he would remain with them and be their strength. Though their faith and trust failed them from time to time, God stuck with them. At this Eucharist we take a brief pause, at a moment of transfiguration, to provide an “inner” tent or dwelling place for God. Here we commemorate God’s fidelity to us. We look back over the difficult desert times of our lives and give thanks to the God who walked with us and stood by us. But we must move on.

There will be no permanent residence or edifice for Jesus or the disciples on the mountaintop, away from the pressing crowds below in the “real world.” They will have to descend and take their place in the building of God’s Kingdom by taking up their cross. Leaving this mountaintop, they (we) must return to lives dedicated to live as Jesus did—as God’s servants and witnesses. How will a transfiguration play out for Jesus from day to day? He will not look any different, nor will his clothes be dazzling white. His transfiguration will continue to happen in his acts of ministry to others; peoples’ lives will be transfigured before him. Sinners will transfigure and turn back to God; the poor and marginalized will transfigure into royal guests at Jesus’ table; the powerless will be transfigured by a new and powerful Spirit; women will be transfigured and counted as equals; those who sought riches and power will be transfigured into detached followers and servant leaders; the illnesses of the sick will transfigure to health and wellness; the mute will speak God’s praises; the blind will see with a new Light.

How might I be transfigured? When some hidden potential comes to light and I put that gift at God’s service; when I truly “listen to him”, paying attention not only to his words but more importantly listening to his example as he gives himself to others. I am transfigured when I can see the spark of divinity in myself, imagining the possibilities within me as I open myself to the call of God to help create a better world. We’ve not been called to live in the rarified atmosphere of mountaintops but on the flat grind of daily labors and struggles that are part of the fabric of our lives. Because of Jesus’ transfiguration and resurrection we can see and listen to these seemingly ordinary events of each day as suffused with the dazzling light of Jesus’ Spirit. We want more of God’s light to shine through us so that others will come to know God’s goodness and love for them through daily service in Jesus’ name.

It was his vision of a better future and his conviction that equal freedoms would one day be enjoyed by all Americans that enabled Martin Luther King to have hope despite the threats to his life. After his death, his experience of the mountaintop inspired his followers to continue his work, just as Jesus’ disciples looked to the mountaintop experience of Jesus’ transfiguration for their hope and were strengthened to further his mission. Like the disciples we have been led apart by ourselves with Christ to this liturgical celebration and have seen his glory. Soon we must return to where we will also find him in our daily lives at moments of transfiguration where we are called to transform this world by God’s grace in order that his glory might be revealed.