

Transfiguration

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, 2 Peter 1:16-19, Matthew 17: 1- 9

August 5, 2017

On our pilgrimage through Israel over five years ago we had an opportunity to visit Mt. Tabor where the transfiguration took place. Our bus went half way up and then we had to negotiate the hair pin turns to the top in mini-vans. On top we attended mass at the magnificent Church of the Transfiguration where I had the opportunity to preach. The view was extraordinary and breathtaking. It must have left an impression on the disciples of the valleys below just as it did us.

All three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Luke and Mark, record the transfiguration. According to the scriptures, six days earlier Jesus and the disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, about 60 miles away, where he had asked, "Who do you say that I am?" It is interesting to note, that just like the disciples, we had been at Caesarea Philippi just six days earlier. They would have gone directly from there to this 2,100 foot high isolated mountain enduring this most difficult climb. This was also a very strategic spot. In all the wars that have taken place in Israel controlling this point was one of the keys to success.

So how appropriate it is that Jesus brings Peter, James and John to this spot where he is transfigured before them with his clothes dazzling white such as no bleach could make them, with Elijah representing the prophets and Moses representing the law before them. Jesus' baptism at the Jordan was the inauguration of his public ministry and now this event, the Transfiguration, is the culminating point. The next stop is Jerusalem where he will go through his passion and death. How impressive this unexpected experience must have been. Peter wants to maintain this high point, this mountain top experience. But soon from a cloud that same voice as at the baptism, "this is my beloved son. Listen to Him." and afterward Jesus is alone. For years the disciples would wonder what happened. What happened is that Jesus is the prophet of prophets. He is the new law. There is no need for another, to dream of what was, only to look forward to Jesus. As stated in our first reading, "a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed."

An ancient tradition has the transfiguration taking place 40 days before Good Friday, the crucifixion. This experience was given to the disciples to help them through the difficult times ahead. On our pilgrimage through life and

perhaps through this ordinary time Jesus may want to take us to a high point, an encounter with the living God, an aha moment, a spiritual discovery, a vision of what God wants us to be. Look at the many experiences we have had in our faith in the past. Some of these are or may have been mountain top experiences. They may have been healings, miracles, reception of the sacraments, God moments, a memorable trip to the beach, a spiritual retreat. ***Like Peter, we too may want to stay in the moment, would like some time to unpack the experiences we have had. But we too will move down the mountain to our everyday life, hopefully transformed, deeply touched and changed forever. We will face our trials and tribulations as we head to our Jerusalem. We thank and trust God for these high point experiences that can give our faith a shot in the arm, a spring in our step as we share Christ with others, and give richer meaning to our lives as Christians. For years we too will often wonder what happened and will reflect deeply.***

We may have had other mountain top experiences. Although some experiences for me were planned, like marriage, travel and children, many may were unplanned, such as a healing, and Marriage Encounter. It is often these unplanned mountain top experiences, like the disciples witnessed today, that impact us deeply and richly for a lifetime. On our trip to Israel, in the opening homily, we were told to not have too many expectations on our pilgrimage. Let the intensity, the emotion, the experience work with God's expectations and let them soak in us. When an experience comes our way we pray that we will be able to relish in the moment and not rush to build three tents, like Peter. Even though it will not be easy, we simply need to be willing to climb the mountain to receive what surprises God has planned for us.

After the experience on Mt. Tabor the disciples were afraid as anyone would have been. After all how many of us have witnessed a talking cloud? But Jesus tells them, "Rise up and do not be afraid." We too might be afraid of what our faith experiences will have in store for us. Jesus will touch us and ask us to rise up. He too will walk down from the mountain top, side by side with us, guiding our path. We need not be afraid.

Jesus, it is so good that we are here. You are the beloved Son. We listen to you!