

8-19-2019 The Transfiguration of Christ

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's very important that we are willing to climb a mountain. Sometimes it seems impossible when God calls us to the mountain that he wants us to climb. We are weak people. We lack experience of God. Sometimes we find that just making it through school traffic is overwhelming, but when we look at the story of God, there's these themes that he always is working with mankind, in order to save mankind. Last night in the readings we heard from Moses and Elijah when they were called to climb a mountain to go to a high place. To be elevated in their existence in order to experience communion with God. Dialogue with God.

And when we look at the Old Testament, we see that there is an incredible degree of solitude in those days when we look at the number of people in the Old Testament that were able to respond to God, that we're voluntarily able to respond to His calling, it's very, very few. And when we read the genealogies or we look at the history of God reveal Himself to man, it seems like the list is long, from Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, all of the prophets, Moses, the greatest among them with Elijah, all the way to John the Baptist coming out of the wilderness where he has been ever since he was a child. It's a long list, but when we compare that to the millions of people on the face of the earth that are supposed to be responding to God, it's a tiny, tiny portion of people, and when we look at Moses particularly, he is really alone in his trying to do the work of God.

When he gets up to the top of the mountain and he is talking with God, and he is still very bold before God, he tells God he wants to see His face. He tells God that God has to go with him. He has to send him forth with a visible sign of God's presence, otherwise the people are not going to believe him. When he gets down from the mountain half the time or more the people have fallen already into worshipping false gods and making idols for themselves.

It is a terrible and wonderfully humorous in the sense of fallen humanity, what these great men had to go through, but to a great degree in solitude. Knowing that they were with God, but then being very alone among the people. We would look at Elijah, the asceticism that these men went through in order to serve God. Moses fasting for 40 days. Elijah being in such an incredible state of fasting and self deprivation when he's trying to make it to the top of the mountain, that God sends angels to feed him. That's extreme. And he gets to the top of the mountain alone again, and he has this incredible experience with God, a culmination of his willingness to serve God and to pursue God. But still, when we look at the whole life of the prophet Elijah, he is most of the time alone and he is most of the time surrounded by people who are very frustrating to be around. People lacking faith, doubting all of the time. But God has all along wanted man to get to the top of the mountain.

Remember that in those days they didn't have airplanes and helicopters, they didn't have hot air balloons. They had never seen a picture from a high elevation or from outer space or something. And so, to go to the top of a mountain was literally, physically the most transcendent experience that you could have. To get up there to the top of the mountain where you are close to heaven. As close to heaven as a person could get physically in those days, having no concept of space travel or something. And you would get to the top of that mountain and you would have this tiny perspective of what it was like to be looking down from above like God does. It was an incredible, elevated experience. And I would literally encourage all of you who have not, to go climb a mountain. Go experience the difficulty of going up that mountain. Say the entire time, "I want to be transfigured. I want to be transfigured", right? The whole time you're hiking. The first time you go up any mountain you usually regret it about halfway, right?

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Daniel and Joseph and I climbed a mountain this summer that was about 7,500 feet tall. And when you're about halfway up you're, "Whose idea was this". You're sweating, it's hot, the view isn't that good depending where you are on the trail. And yet when you get to the top, even these days, even with our easy access to phenomenal aerial photography and views from above, to be yourself at the top of a mountain and be in the highest place in that area and see, just to see the world around you. With the horizon and the vision that you can't have when we are down on streets or in our car, it's a very transcendent experience. And I have never gone to the top of a mountain with anybody ever and had the people regret it once they reached the top.

I've been many times on the trail with people, particularly the youth group saying, "Whose idea was this", right? "Father Thaddeus, this is terrible". And then you get up there and you have, although it is a physical experience, it's a mystical experience. And we get up to the top of that mountain where we are closer to God and it is where He wants us to be. And when we look at the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain, something so incredible for, first of all, it's hard for us to even comprehend it. But so incredible that the holy apostle Peter, the co-leader of the apostles, when he is writing to the church, he doesn't say, "Only... I heard that Christ was crucified and taken down from the cross and buried", because he wasn't there. He doesn't say, "I saw Jesus resurrected from the dead", in the actual action of being resurrected, because he wasn't there. He says, "What is delivered to us, what we believe in, what we are teaching doesn't come from people. We were there on the mountain when he was transfigured before us. And we heard the voice of the Father speaking to him. We saw Moses and Elijah appearing with him". So on a personal experience, other than the apostle John who saw a lot more than the other apostles because he did not run away.

When Christ invites the apostles to go with him up the mountain, something very, very different is happening. Remember, Moses had to climb that mountain by himself and he was up there fasting for 40 days. Elijah had to endure incredible fasting, aided by an angel in order to make it up to the mountain top and to encounter God. And now God himself is going to the people and saying, "You, you and you, come with me". It's not even their idea to climb the mountain, it's his. And He leads them up there. God is with them as they climb. When they get up there, they are still such faithless and weak people that they're falling asleep and, right? They're tired. They're the ones that are complaining along the trail.

They don't know what is about to happen, but Christ travels with them. He brings them along. He makes it happen. He takes them up to the top of the mountain. He chooses them as companions and He is transfigured voluntarily before them. Revealing himself as He truly is, in the fullness of His divinity and His humanity. And that is the good news for us Christians, that now we have to climb that mountain still, but Christ is climbing it with us. Christ is inviting us to go up. Christ is going to hold our hand along the way and encourage us when we are feeling weak. Christ is going to be there with us when we reach the top and then reveal himself in His fullness.

So we still have a great mountain to climb. It's hard. There isn't anything worth doing in life that isn't hard. There's nothing that is worth doing that is easy. We have to be a people that love the labor. We have to be the people that enjoy the sweat and the blood and the scrapes and the falls along the way, because we're getting to the top. We are spiritual athletes who don't mind that the practice is hard because the victory is great. And so, when we go on in life, starting this year, I love that in the fall we have the feast of Transfiguration. Because in this coming year we have to be transfigured a little bit more. We have to do that by choosing to climb. We have to do that by ignoring the difficulty and the sweat and the wounds along the way. They're signs of victory, by the way. If we focus on them, they're

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very inconvenient and uncomfortable. If we focus on what they symbolize, it means we're making progress. We're getting higher up there.

I pray that everybody would have that vision in life of achieving a little bit of elevation day-to-day. Doing a little bit more. Climbing a little bit higher. Putting out a little bit more effort. And loving, loving, loving the journey, and even the work that it is along the way. We are called to the top of the mountain, but we don't have to go there alone anymore. Christ calls us. He leads the way, and he will be there when we arrive at the top.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.