

Go to the Mountain

Last Sunday after the Epiphany

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Our Gospel reading today, tells us the story of the special revelation to Peter, John and James concerning who Jesus was. This event - the Transfiguration - is one of the great mysteries of the faith. Not in the sense that it did or didn't happen, but that what it revealed about Jesus is part of our difficulty in our understanding that Jesus was both fully Human and fully Divine. Here on the mountain the disciples glimpse something of his divinity, and it evokes in them feelings of terror. These are the same feelings that re-occur constantly in the Old Testament encounters between humanity and God. Indeed, there is the sense of amazement that they have seen God and have not died.

It is interesting to note that the anti-authority movement that developed in the sixties had an impact on the church. As the sense of inappropriateness of authority gripped our western world, this rebellion changed the way that the church both perceived and presented Jesus. There was the Jesus movement, which developed the theme of Jesus my friend - as opposed to the authority of the Lordship of Jesus in previous generations.

Like it or not, we are products of this thinking some forty years later and the profound impact that this has made on the church and our understanding corporately of who Jesus is an issue that we will need to deal with in the years to come. Our fear of Jesus the authority figure has caused us to soft pedal on this aspect and in making Jesus too approachable, we have made him less divine. Perhaps simply put, we need a good dose of Awe every now and again to keep things in perspective.

Now I am not saying that we should return to former times, after all, you could quote me Ecclesiastes "Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this" but go back in time to when we had different expectations on God and ourselves. The concept of Sunday Best has all but gone from our society. Not that we should return to the days of starched collars and uncomfortable clothing, but there was the sense that we made an effort because we were coming into the presence of the divine. The approachable Jesus that is now proclaimed loses all sense of his divinity, and although there is a need to be able to draw close to his love, I think we lose something when we fail to acknowledge who he really is.

This is the importance of the feast of the Transfiguration that we celebrate at this time. The last Sunday before Lent, the last Sunday of the Epiphany, is a reminder of the completeness of the revelation of Jesus as human and divine. The Human Baby of the Epiphany is complemented by the Transfigured Christ, or perhaps it would be better to say is completed by the Transfigured Christ. Indeed, this is what brings us to our knees in penitence on Ash Wednesday. Without this, we can become Christians who are satisfied with our own shortcomings, particularly when these are compared to those of others. I believe that this is the reason for the rise in sin and the tolerance to

sin in our society, and dare I say it - in the church as well. Although I do think that there is better reporting of these things, there is a certain arrogance in projecting our own societal failures back on preceding generations with a false pride in that we now better report these things - they were always there - they were just covered up. Our lack of understanding of the true divinity of Christ is that thing which is responsible for the rise in these things not better reporting methods. Although I am not typically the Fire and Brimstone preacher, the reality of Hell that comes from the understanding of the Divinity of Christ is something that acts as a powerful deterrent to sin.

We have lost the space for silence in this busy world. This is the purpose of quiet days and retreats, but these have all but disappeared in church life. Do we take seriously this need for the mountaintop?

So why is this mountaintop so important?

It may seem simple to say this but the clearer our vision of God, the more clearly we can present him to the world. If our vision of Jesus is distorted, then how can we NOT present a distorted Christ to others.

We must go to the mountain to clearly see the transfigured Christ, before we can fully understand the crucified Christ of Good Friday or the Risen Christ of Easter. I know that some have already made this journey, but we need to re-visit our spiritual places that we might be renewed and refreshed to continue the faith journey. To be reminded of who it is who calls us friend.

So how do we get there?

Perhaps the Gospel gives us some clues. It was an actual mountain that they went to, but it is not so much that we ought to go up to a specific mountain, but that we should find a place where we can be alone with God. Isolation with God is about leaving those things behind. So, to find a place, we perhaps need to find space as well. It was a deliberate choice. The transfiguration was not a happy accident that came in the middle of life. They had chosen to go with Jesus to the place - and even though the events that occurred were beyond both their comprehension and expectation, they had chosen to separate themselves from society.

Third point to draw on is to expect that there will be something new in it. We tend to become used to God, but it never ceases to amaze me how God will constantly find new ways to reveal himself to me.

As we approach Lent, perhaps this can be our commitment for this time. To make space and place for God with anticipation that he will show us something new. To find time that we might pause in our life's journey to meet with him and thus grow in faith.

Let us remind ourselves to go to the mountain to get things into perspective.

AMEN