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## WITH PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN

Every year the gospel of the second Sunday of Lent takes us up a high mountain where Jesus is revealed as never before in His earthly years. We walk with Peter, James, and John, who had no foreknowledge of what was about to occur. To their amazement, Christ “was transfigured before them, and His clothes became dazzling white” (Mk 9:2,3). More would take place to astonish the three disciples even further. Moses and Elijah appear conversing with Jesus. What did those two Hebrew Bible figures discuss with the One Who came as their Savior and ours? Moses had received the Law on another mountain, Sinai, between 2000 and 1500 years earlier. Elijah, the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, who had been taken up in a cloud, flourished about 875 years before Christ.

The three synoptic writers tell us of the event on the high mountain, but no word is recorded concerning the conversation. The awesomeness of the moment captured Peter and right away he made plans to prolong it. “Let us erect three tents on this site, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Caught up in wonder, who wants to go down where the struggles of ordinary life await? Not Peter, not me.

Then out of a cloud, a Father’s voice proclaimed, “This is My Son, My beloved.. Listen to Him” ( Mk 9:5,7). Listen to Him. These are the words the Father says to us. Through Jesus, we have been made children of God, destined for an eternal inheritance. “Listen to Him.”

The Lenten narratives tell what Jesus said to those He encountered as He made His way, ever nearer to another height, that of Calvary. Listen to Him in all the stories the Evangelists record. What He says is meant for your ears. Incorporate those Gospel tales into your own life. Hear what Jesus declares and see how He acts. All of this is for you. He wants you to speak to Him about your concerns and the needs of those you love. Jesus will always give you an answer. Read the scripture accounts and find quotations, long or short, where you can recognize Him addressing you. When you find one that holds you more forcibly, repeat it to yourself and let it speak to you for the rest of the day or for several days. That is how Christ’s words become embedded in our memory. Then they are available to us like background music which we sometimes bring to the forefront of our consciousness.

In Matthew’s account of the Transfiguration event, the heavenly voice arouses fear in Peter, James, and John. “They fell forward on the ground and were very much afraid” Jesus is aware of their terror, as He is whenever we are alarmed. He comes to us, as He did then to the prostrate trio. Theirs was a fear based on a celestial visitation. But Christ touches us in any earthly moment when fright takes hold of us. “Arise, and do not be afraid,” (Mt 17:6,7) He says.

Fear is woven into our mortal existence and whenever it clutches our hearts, we find a refuge in our Brother Jesus. He tells us to rise up from the ground of apprehension so that our trepidation may find in Him the strength to deal with it. His hand reaches over the prostrate forms of the frightened, and that blessed contact brings new comfort into their circumstances.

We pray for all in our human family who face overwhelming difficulties in this prolonged period of violence and terrorizing. Lent is a season of fasting, of giving from whatever abundance we have, whether it be material or spiritual goods. St. Augustine in a Lenten sermon declares, “Our very prayer gives alms when it is directed to God and poured forth, not only for friends but also for enemies and when it fasts from anger and hatred...Let us always fast from hatred, always feed on love” (Sermon 207 in the New City Press edition).

Peter and his companions must have looked back at their experience with Jesus on the mountain and realized they were being prepared for the terrible losses in the days ahead. The hill of Golgotha would last for an agonizing stretch of passing hours. What we see in the Transfiguration is the splendor we are destined for beyond the limits of time. We are established now in a world of changing sequences where *what is* gives way to *what will be*. Ahead lies eternal fullness: never ending and more brilliant than what the three disciples saw.

The Second Letter of Peter describes how “we were eyewitnesses...(Jesus) received glory and praise from God the Father. We ourselves heard this said from Heaven.” The author of the epistle then turns to us. “We possess the prophetic message as something altogether reliable. Keep your attention closely fixed on it as you would on a lamp shining in a dark place until the first streaks of dawn appear and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pt 1:17-19).

Shine, O Star which is Christ, in all our human darkness.

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