

HOMILY

The Second Sunday of Lent

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It starts off ordinarily enough. Jesus and three of his closest friends—Peter, James and John—go up on a very high mountain. Nothing unusual; Jesus often went off from the crowds to pray and rest. All very ordinary. But from here on, ordinary ends. No sooner do they arrive than Jesus is suddenly “transfigured.” He “glowed.” as Mark tells us, *“His clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them,”* not only out of the ordinary, but absolutely out of this world; which is precisely what the story wants to convey. And if that is not out-of-the-ordinary enough, two of faith’s most honored heroes suddenly appear by Jesus’ side—Moses, the great law-giver, and Elijah, the prophet par excellence—the law, the prophets—paying respect to Jesus, in whom both are brought together.

This is both literally and figuratively a “mountain top experience.” No wonder Peter, James and John are terrified. Of course, a little terror never stopped Peter from speaking up. For lack of any other ideas, he suggests putting up three tents to commemorate the events. Up on that mountain, Peter, James and John had been given nothing less than a glimpse into the future. They saw past the suffering and death of Jesus, which their Master had predicted a few days before, past their doubts, past their fears. For one brief shining moment, God had cracked the door to the end of time and they had seen how history would be worked out, their own, as well as the world’s. And they would never be the same again. Wow!

What do you think? When you have seen how everything turns out in the end, will it affect how you view the present? Of course, it will. However, life is lived not on the mountain top but in the valley.

Like Peter, our prayer might be “Lord, carry me away to the mountain.” Like Peter we, too, want to settle in rather than go back down to a scary world. But Jesus would have none of it. We visit mountains, but we live in the valleys.

Like Peter, James and John, many times we want to keep our heads in the clouds, enclosed in our own little world, and fail to come down to reality where we find God's will and purpose. How many times do we lose sight of what God puts before us?

We have little concern in caring for the environment because we have lost touch with nature. We find that our lives have little contact with nature, the soil, the trees and animals. We are not fully aware of the larger world around us. How long has it been since you felt the soil in your hands, planted a seed, or cared for a plant? We are so far removed from the world of nature that people don't know the names of trees, plants, and birds anymore. They are nameless.

When something loses its name, it loses its meaning for us. It could also lose its respect for its place in God's world of creation. We miss the wonder and the glory of nature because we are not fully awake to it.

Today, our heads are in the clouds and our minds are in a dream world. We are dreaming the American dream that prosperity will solve most of our problems. I grew up in the '50s and early '60's, and we were constantly treated to the marvels of the times. At school we were vaccinated against polio, ending the fear of what was a dreaded disease. I remember the day the first black and white television was delivered to our home. I remember when the corner store was replaced by the supermarket overflowing with variety and abundance. I remember seeing for the first time the vapor trail of the new jet plane and staring at it until it disappeared. There was an endless array of gadgets and machines. No problems in those days seemed beyond solution. We were convinced that life was invincible and the Great Society was inevitable. On these two pillars of faith rested our national identity and our hopes for the future. In those days, optimism reigned. Our churches were full and we equated middle class values with the Christian life.

All too well we know that our pillars are crashing all around us. Our good society has been disfigured by poverty, homelessness, the breakdown of the family, staggering budget deficits and joblessness. We are learning the hard way that prosperity does not automatically provide personal happiness or bring fulfillment. Such a dream has become a nightmare.

So, what do we do? Do we pray that the Lord will take us up to the mountain? How do we take on the challenges of everyday living? Let's go back to the story in Mark:

“A cloud appeared and enveloped the disciples and a voice from the cloud was heard. ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.’”

“Listen to him.” That's God's prescription for a successful life. Listen to Jesus. Learn from him. Open yourself to him. Call out to him. Lean on him. He *knows* the heart of God. He *is* the heart of God. He *knows* the will of God. He *is* the will of God. Just as he was with the disciples in glory on the mountain, he is with us as the deepest hurts possible flood our souls.

