

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, August 6, 2017

The Transfiguration of the Lord

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom

A MOUNTAIN CHECK UP

Whenever we go to a particular place, we do so for a reason. We do not travel to a specific location without some purpose or goal in mind.

In Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 17:1-9), we hear how "Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother, John, and led them up a high mountain." There, Jesus was transfigured, "his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with him. Then suddenly the Divine Presence made itself known in a luminous cloud and in words from the heavens, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

That describes what happened. But why did Jesus go up that mountain in the first place? He obviously had a purpose in mind.

We might answer that Jesus went up the mountain to display his divine glory to Peter, James, and John. Yet if that was his purpose, why did Jesus bring only three apostles and not the other nine? Would not all twelve have benefited from witnessing his transfiguration?

But it seems unlikely that Jesus' purpose was to reveal his glory. Jesus did not perform wondrous deeds to impress people. At the beginning of his ministry when the devil told Jesus to amaze people by throwing himself down from the parapet of the temple, Jesus firmly rejected that temptation. Furthermore, many times in the Gospels Jesus specifically instructed people not to publicize his miraculous powers.

Maybe the answer can be found in the realization that, according to the Gospel of Matthew, the transfiguration occurs six days after Jesus makes the first prediction of his coming suffering and death in Jerusalem. Perhaps Jesus went up on the mountain because he wanted to be sure he was on the right path, the path in keeping with his Father's will.

There on the mountain, Jesus experienced the presence of God who affirmed him as his faithful, obedient Son, whose message the Father wished all to hear and follow. "This is my beloved Son ... listen to him."

There on the mountain, Jesus was joined by Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the prophet. In his Gospel, Luke tells us that they spoke to Jesus about "his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31) These great figures of Israel affirmed Jesus in his mission, a mission that would take him to the cross.

The presence of Peter, James, and John may also indicate that on the mountain Jesus was making certain he was doing the Father's will. For in the account of the Agony in the Garden as Jesus prays, "not as I will, but as you will," those disciples are the ones Jesus has nearest him. In

both instances, those three, who must have been special in his eyes, are physically close as he discerns if he is doing the Father's will.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus took time to be sure he was doing what the Father desired. That is why he went up the mountain with Peter, James, and John.

What Jesus did, we also need to do. We need to discern if our lives are in line with God's will. Only those who do as the Father wishes will be transfigured in glory!

© 2017 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski