

Over the years I have envied the apostles Peter, my namesake James and his brother John their "mountain top experience" in today's gospel story of Jesus' Transfiguration. It was for them an experience of clarity in their following of Jesus. They glimpsed the full reality of the person of Jesus, God and human. Their doubts, their questions of faith all appeared to be answered. No wonder Peter wanted to savor and save the experience by erecting three tents so that he and his companions along with Jesus, Moses and Elijah could continue the vision and its peace into an endless future.

What Peter, James and John experienced on the mountain, we all strive to experience, not only when it comes to faith, but in other areas of life itself. After spending years in school (and then years paying off the loans!) settling in to a job or building a career, starting a family, after turning forty, fifty or sixty years old, striving toward the goal of our life or career we expect that there are not many more journeys to take or changes to make. What was going to happen has pretty much happened. We are inclined to believe we have finally "arrived" at the person we set out to become.

In terms of our faith much of the same dynamic may also be present. Most of us here at Mass have spent years, decades, a whole life living by the tenets of faith, participating in the sacramental life of the church week in and week out, year in and year out. And maybe, just maybe, some of us have had (or right now are experiencing) what spiritual writers call a "mountain top experience" a period of spiritual consolation. We feel secure in our faith, our supposed knowledge about Jesus and the church. We can understand and empathize with Peter, James and John.

But, if we paid close attention to the gospel story, we experience a radical call from Jesus today. While not denying his three closest disciples their unique faith experience, it is, only a "glimpse" of heavenly life and glory in Jesus. At the end of the story while telling the disciples not to be afraid, Jesus gently, but firmly, leads them down the mountain to continue the journey with him, a journey that will lead ultimately to another mountain top, Mount Calvary and his death on the cross. St. Matthew

situates today's story between the first and second predictions by Jesus of his passion and death and immediately after his admonition that anyone seeking to be his disciple must "deny themselves take up the cross and follow him" (Mt. 16:24).

The recently canonized St. John Henry Cardinal Newman stated, "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." Jesus invites Peter, James, John and us to take the risk of change, of growth in faith and become "perfect" in the sense of the Scriptures—whole, complete, fully alive, fully human and filled with the same divine life and light that shines through him—to become as we were created, "the image and likeness of God".

As a model of such transformation today's first reading holds up the person of Abraham. At the time of God's call Abraham was seventy-five years old. At seventy-five you've pretty well seen the landscape. Not much more is to be expected. But for Abraham it was just the beginning. There was another call: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk. Go away from all the supposed or real security you have built up in your life. Go forth to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation" (Gn. 12:1-4). Yeah, right. Fat chance. Yet this old man stirred to the voice of God. He took the risk of stepping out in faith. He hit the road. It would take twenty-five more years for the promised covenant to take shape. He would be a hundred years old when Isaac was born and would live another hundred years. Abraham, and Sarah his wife as well, remind us that there is always more. There is always a further call as long as we tread this earthly road, as long as we do not close ourselves to life or divine grace.

A woman who thinks she has had enough in her professional work discovers a new and marvelous power to love and to heal. A priest at sixty-five taps into vast depths of courage and possibility within himself he had never imagined. A couple married fifty years thanks Marriage Encounter for helping them finally understand each other. To mention a couple of examples.

It's time to come down the mountain. It's time to continue the journey.