

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus exhibits an obvious fondness for the mountains of Palestine. With his disciples often in tow, he repeatedly scales their slopes and rests atop their peaks. Not the ragged, majestic heights of the Alpine or Rocky Mountain ranges, yet these low and arid peaks of the heights of Israel still possess a stunning beauty.

Jesus' love for Palestine's peaks centers more than on their natural appeal. Jesus draws near to these hills for the same reason Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah did. Their summits are holy. On these favored heights, the Father of creation chose to collect his scattered people, to receive their prayers and sacrifices, and to reveal to them his wise and loving providence. For the Israelites, these peaks stood as witnesses to the Lord's salvific work, reminders of their own election. Jesus himself uses a mountain peak to inaugurate his mission, framing the values of the Kingdom he has come to bring in the Beatitudes. Today's feast celebrates that on another occasion, in anticipation of his impending death, our Lord chooses Mount Tabor (later to be the scene of Jesus' return to the Father in his resurrected glory in the Ascension) to reveal his divinity and offer comfort to his disciples. At his Transfiguration, Jesus adds Mount Tabor to the highest rank of Israel's hallowed peaks only be surpassed by Mount Calvary.

For Peter, James and John, the mystery of the Transfiguration marks a final step in their formation as apostles. They have been chosen by Jesus to witness the horror of his cross, but they require one last lesson in grace before confronting its terror. On the mountain of the Transfiguration, on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus strengthens these men to endure his passion by offering them a deep look into the grace of the incarnation, of the union of divine and human nature in him. On Mount Tabor, Jesus reveals to them the glory of his divinity by allowing it to shine for an instant through his transfigured humanity. In a glory hitherto unseen by the disciples, everything changes around them. Without leaving this world, they are enveloped by the life of the world to come. In the transfigured glory of Jesus the disciples are given a glimpse of the ultimate goal that putting their faith, abandoning everything out of love for Jesus, of following him as disciples will lead—too to their destiny of being transfigured, divinized, in a resurrected life that will never end in union with God.

We know, that despite all that they had seen on the holy mountain, Peter and James in the crisis moment of Jesus' passion ascent to Mount Calvary and his cross ultimately abandon any association with Jesus: Peter verbally and physically; James along with the other disciples physically; only John, by tradition, would remain standing beneath the cross with Jesus' mother, Mary. However, on Easter day night Peter, James and the other disciples would come to know what John already knew and experienced, the overflowing power of God's forgiveness revealed in Jesus' cross and Resurrection even in the face of their sinful betrayal.

Today's celebration of Jesus' Transfiguration is an occasion for us, too, to be renewed and strengthened in our faith. These "dog days" of August with their, at times, oppressive heat that drains strength out of us also remind us of the "dog days" of our faith journey with Jesus. We, too, in the face of the "heat" of our own personal struggles—physical, emotional, spiritual, the weight of our past and/or present sins, the pressures of the world to conform to its ways of life, can feel "drained", tempted to abandon the discipleship road, our daily share of shouldering Jesus cross, seeing before us only suffering, darkness, and death.

Today's celebration, like the disciples experience on Mount Tabor, is a glimpsing of the goal of our faith, ultimate glory, eternal resurrected life with God through Jesus. Our lives, our bodies washed in the waters of baptism, anointed with Chrism in the sealing of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, and fed and strengthened by the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, are destined to be transfigured. We who bear the name and mark of Christian are works in progress, being recreated and transfigured in Christ even amid our weaknesses and sins to the extent we cooperate with his grace. On this Feast Day we are invited with Peter, James and John to consider whether the truth which it reveals is being embraced and experienced in our daily lives.

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