

Second Sunday of Lent

Jesus took Peter, James, and John
and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them,
and his clothes became dazzling white,
such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.
Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses,
and they were conversing with Jesus.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,
"Rabbi, it is good that we are here!
Let us make three tents:
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.
Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;
from the cloud came a voice,
"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."
Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone
but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain,
he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone,
except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.
So they kept the matter to themselves,
questioning what rising from the dead meant.

Mk 9:2-10

He didn't want them to speak about the transfiguration because he had not yet risen from the dead. It is a very surprising detail of this story. It's easy to omit because Jesus' request is located at the very end. This very detail, however, establishes the whole perspective of the scene on the mountain.

I am tempted to follow Peter's emotion. It must have been wonderful to be there. Jesus is standing in this spectacular revelation of his glory. Elijah and Moses, who already seem like characters from the legends, are standing next to him. The voice of the Father surrounds everything with an all-encompassing cloud.

All the doubts of humanity, all the questions about the history of the people of Israel, all the uncertainties that accompany the history of people meeting the history of God, are finally put to rest. Nothing could be simpler and nothing could be better. We have finally arrived.

A mystical experience like this can very easily be interpreted, by me, as the end of the road. I have arrived. I feel close to God and I have certitude about Him. There seems to be nothing more to be said or done. Very similar effects might be caused by an experience of the real community of the Church or a deep encounter with the great wisdom of Christians. We call those moments by different names, but at the end they mean the same. It is best expressed by Peter: "Rabbi, it is good that we are here!"

Here is also the place where I can deceive myself. The encounter with Jesus is not for my personal satisfaction or even my personal conversion, although both of them can happen as a result. Every experience like that, if it's real, ends in the same way, "Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them."

Is it surprising? Is it terrifying? Disappointing? What more can I want than the presence of Jesus? This very feeling of disenchantment is also a signal that I need to listen to Christ even more. He invited me to walk with him on the road to Mount Calvary. He wants me to be close to him and to be transformed by his greatest gift, when he offers himself to the Father on the cross. He wants me to walk through the crucifixion with him and be raised again with him in the glory of the resurrection. The mountains of transfiguration are not the goal. They are just signs on the road, so that I am not lost, so that I don't forget the one who walks with me.

Jesus forbade the disciples to talk about the glory they saw on the mountain until they see the Son of Man's whole amazing labor for us. He wanted them to become his true witnesses, not just companions of the pleasant experience somewhere in the past.