



Thoughts on the Journey...

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There is a majestic nineteenth century mansion that sits on the shore of Muckross Lake, located outside of Killarney, in County Kerry, Ireland. It's quite an impressive spectacle. They offer tours of the mansion and the gardens daily. When the tour group I was with arrived, they gave us instructions about how to proceed with the tour of the mansion, the location of the gift shop and restrooms, and other incidentals. We were free to explore on our own and given ample time to enjoy the mansion and manicured gardens. As beautiful as the mansion was from the outside, I was more taken with the grounds and the spectacular lake that seemed to be calling my name. I guess you could say that I took the *road less traveled* and veered away from the group that was filing inside.

My journey began with a garden path close to the building and continued until I came upon a sign with an arrow that pointed in the direction of the boat house. The boat house wasn't mentioned by the tour group, but since we were given three hours to explore, I decided to give it a go and move in that direction. The foliage was beautiful, complete with palm trees! It seemed like I had walked for an hour or so when I paused for a moment wondering if perhaps I was headed in a direction that was too far from the crowd. Something told me to continue for a little while longer. The path I was on intersected with another path and my direction shifted as a sign with an arrow pointed me to the boat house once again. Finally, I had arrived at the boat house situated on a cove in the lake where large plush green hills gated the area. The crisp blue sky was the backdrop for white cumulous clouds that seemed to sail slowly like schooners in no particular hurry. Intersecting rays of light poured through the cloud openings and made their way to the lake creating a spread of glistening colors like I have never seen before. Suddenly, I felt a rush of peace pour over me and I was sure I was standing in a sanctuary of God's making - a very holy place. It was glorious! And if it's possible for *glorious* to permeate your entire being, it happened to me on that October day in Ireland. I didn't

want to depart from where I was. I could have left everyone and everything that was meaningful to me, just to hold on to those moments that I believe were God's embrace. My experience in Ireland reminds me of Peter's encounter with the Transfiguration in Luke's gospel. Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of the mountain to pray.

While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white.

In glory, Moses and Elijah appeared and began conversing with Jesus. Peter was so taken in by this event, that he wanted to stay and suggested building tents: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. What a glorious experience that must have been for those apostles to witness something of that magnitude. No wonder Peter didn't want to leave.

Like Peter, when we have a profound spiritual encounter, we want to linger in the awe of God's greatness, to be drenched in the light of his presence. Those kind of brushes with God are a wonderful thing. Once we've had that kind of deep encounter, we live in anticipation of another.

However, for most of us, those euphoric moments of faith are few and far between. Usually we go along day-by-day, living our lives clothed in the garment of the *ordinary*. But, let's not forget that God is also present in our prosaic, average, commonplace existence. We have to be careful that while we are searching and hoping to recapture that exhilarating feeling of God, we don't fix our gaze where he can no longer be found. We have to be willing to return to the work of helping to build his kingdom.

Lack of *feeling* God's presence does not equate with a lack of God's presence; God is always there! So, when the retreat is over, when the light of glory seems dim, when the bells seem to stop pealing, when we descend from the mountaintop, or when we have to get back on the tour bus, Our Lord is still with us calling us to live the ordinary with great love. When we seek God there and trust in his presence, he will reveal himself to us in ways we can't imagine. It is the cumulative experience of our daily relationship with God in the ordinary and obedience to his Son that will lead us to the mountaintop of his eternal light.