

+ J. M. J.

After your first year of seminary you go to Mexico to learn Spanish. I remember most vividly the barrage of noise of which I was unfamiliar, and, not knowing Spanish, I couldn't ask anyone what those noises were. There were constant sirens which apparently were the notification of those delivering propane to the neighborhood houses. Then there was the sound of the engine brakes on the truck which to me sounded like a small airplane to me. Everything was so different, yet I knew I was still on the same planet, but in a different country.

We all have experiences of being in surroundings that we are unfamiliar with. I suspect that is what St. Peter woke up to. Groggy eyed, he observed two men standing with Jesus. He knew he was on the mountaintop, but with the glory that was not of this earth all his senses told him that he was in heaven. He is so overjoyed and giddy he recognizes that this must have been the joy the Israelites experienced when they escaped Egypt. They had built little tents when they arrived at Succoth because the name of the place meant tent or booth. You can imagine the celebration that must have followed, and Peter wanted to celebrate like his ancestors because he thought he was in heaven and all earthly concerns and pains were far gone.

It is good to ask in prayer what must heaven be like. There everyone loves one another. There is no pain because there is no sin. Without sin how can we hurt each other? Everyone responds to each other in love doing what is best for each other. Imagine. Without sin we could interpret everyone's actions as selfless, as done out of love for me and everyone else, and we could never be offended. That's heaven.

This glory shown through Jesus is who he is by nature, but Jesus makes that same glory our destiny. We heard and believe the words of the second reading. **"He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body"** (Phil. 3:21). There are certain people in whom we literally can see the glory of the kingdom of heaven because Jesus is transforming them and that too happens in us now if we let it. St. Paul uses that same Greek word for transfiguration, *metamorphoō*, to describe what Jesus is doing in

each of us. Think about a picture of Mother Teresa. Her face beams with the joy of heaven because she has discovered and has been overshadowed by that transforming love of Jesus.

Peter missed one thing; this experience was but a taste of heaven. Jesus had to face the cross first, and all of the disciples would have to face their own death. When Jesus told the disciples that he will suffer greatly and that they must take up their crosses and follow him, he also told them there were some standing with him, that is Peter, John, and James, that will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. That is the purpose of the transfiguration, to give us the strength to face our daily crosses. It is why this reading is so appropriate for Lent.

So, for now we come down from the mountain, but we remember. What an impression this day must have meant on Peter. He wrote about that day in his second letter, and it is good to reflect on how this event gave him great hope. **“[Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father when that unique declaration came to him from the majestic glory, ‘This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain. Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”** (2 Pet. 17-19).

Just as that event change Peter’s life forever we remember those miraculous experiences in our lives and those profound moments we have had in prayer of God’s love, and we meditate on them when the time is tough because we know our true destiny. If we haven’t had such experiences we beg in prayer, God let me know how much you love me, and we must give God time in quiet prayer to overshadow us. It is these experiences which help us to carry our crosses through Lent and through life and remind of us our hope in our heavenly destination.