

Driving back to Macedon after the Planning Day, something really seemed different about the mountain. The light, in the impending storm light, took on a clarity and brilliance that I have not noticed before. It was blue, yet clearly defined. It was almost as if I was looking, using my photography mindset, at a HDR of reality. It was both perfectly, under and overexposed all at once. The edges were crisp. The light really caught my attention.

Maybe it was the background light that was causing this effect. It was a blue-grey sky that was both moody, threatening and ominous. You could make out clearly the different timbers of the mountain. And there, as I turned into Mount Macedon Road, as the sun broke through the partial break in clouds, the cross glistened. It was as if, well, the cross changed momentarily. It went from being just discernible if you knew where to look, it was, well, to use a Latin word, transfigured.

In reflecting on my calling to this place, it was indeed one of the mountaintop trips I made in seeking a prayerful answer. I remember sitting there; I remember sitting up on the Camel's Hump; I remember the journey home. It was dark. I stopped opposite CoR and stood in Centennial Park and listened. The frogs were in good voice. But I had been to the mountain top, and I knew that somehow, I was changed. I had reached the point of saying, *Your Will Be Done*.

All three of our star players in today's gospel portion have been to the mountain top and had their lives transformed. For Moses, it was the God of the Mountains: *el Shaddai* that constantly challenged him to bring the people of Israel back into the promised land. On the side of the mountain, he was challenged by a talking bush. He ascended the mountain to talk with God. The ten words were given to him on the mountain, twice. And each time he returned to the people of Israel, he had changed. His countenance was such that he shone. You could see the brilliance of being in the presence of God radiate from him. To stop people being afraid, Moses veiled his face so that the reflection of God would not adversely affect the people.

At the end of his life, Moses once again ascended the mountain top, and looked over to view the promised land. This was as far as he was to go. His eyes had seen the glory of God's people, Israel.

Elijah, meeting God at Horeb, ascends a mountain in search for the divine. There, he encountered wind, earthquake, and fire. It was here that Elijah discerned something very important about God. There was nothing in the natural disasters that pointed to a divine presence of destruction or punishment. God was not in the calamity. What followed was one of the most frightening things we can face. Silence. Sheer silence: a silence so really present you could feel it. On hearing the silence, Elijah veiled his face, lest he was to be transfigured by encountering the presence of God. But there was no doubting it, Elijah, in the presence of God was truly changed.

So, unsurprisingly, Jesus, on a mountain top, appears to alter in appearance, and he is joined by both Moses and Elijah: two others who have stood in the presence of God. The light was exceptional, and Jesus' appearance was indeed transfigured. The glory of God radiated from him, and the two great men of the Hebrew scriptures were engaged in conversation. And the voice of God affirms for the Peter, James and John: this is my Son. Listen to him.

Peter's response is two-fold. Taken by the spectacle, and appreciating the divine presence, he affirmed the moment and offers to build three tents. In the Hebrew, he offers three tabernacles: dwellings for God. There, God, in all the divine glory, will have pitched a tent in their presence. I think the next sentence really highlights what was going on for Peter. *He did not know what to say, for they were terrified*. If that was not enough, God then spoke to them.

The pitching of the tent was a curious response from Peter. It is suggestive of holding onto God's glory as they had seen and heard, yet, this was not what Jesus intended. Rather than respond to their

requests, Jesus tells them to keep quiet about what just happened. Having been to the mountain top and glimpsing the promised glory, the disciples, were yet to see it fully revealed. Only after the resurrection would this all make sense.

In the 1960s, Dr Martin Luther-King drew on the imagery of the mountain top as he was transfigured before the people. He knew that his time was limited. The death threats around him had come to a fever point. "I have been to the mountain top," he said. *"And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"*

The following day, he was assassinated in Memphis (April 3, 1968).

Peter, James and John had also seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. The brilliance of Jesus' appearance was to cast the light that was to create the shadow that was the cross. Without that bright light, the shadow could not exist. The reason for the Messianic secret was to look back and see that moment in the light of who Jesus really is.

The Son of God. The Messiah.

Over the last few weeks, we've journeyed with the various calls to follow Jesus. Last week, as we recalled the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, it was in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mount that the Messiah was presented. It was the ancient Simeon who realised that Jesus is the Light of the World, and this light signified new life, but also, the reckoning of the age of sin and darkness. He said, as he blessed the child, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. A light, to lighten all people, and the glory of God's chosen, Israel."

It wasn't a political statement, but one of deep understanding in faith.

We are all called to make this known to all people whom we encounter. This is at the heart of our mission here, in, on, under the shadow of the mountain. The cross of Christ, empty, and proud, shines as a beacon looking over to the plains of the region. It is a place of pilgrimage in which we are also called to be transfigured. In refusing the tent, the veil of hiding from God was lifted, and we are asked to see God's glory face to face.

This is the transfiguring we are called to in our lives. It is a change that will enable us as a community, and individually, to let the light of God shine on in our lives. Our love for all people and our faith in Christ is to be effective in all the good that we do. We are called to be not only people of faith, but active stewards of God's love of us. It is a gift that demands sharing. It is a gift that brings goodness into the light and defines the outer edges of darkness. It is a change that helps us to see clearly what it is that we are being called to do, to be and how to grow. It is a call for generosity that reaches out and is not bound by the building of tents to hold that glory in the one place.

Jesus left the mountain to face Jerusalem. Elijah went off to Syria where he created kingdoms that still fight there today. Moses was called to God and passed his mantle on to others, as did Elijah, and Jesus. That mantle is one we wear. All we need to do is to take it off our faces and see the glory of God that was won at such cost by Jesus, the Son of God.

As we begin our journey into Lent, may that light transfigure not just us, but our entire community so that Christ may be fully known in all our words, deeds and being.