

The Transfiguration.

6-8-17.

Consolation.

The story of the Transfiguration, which we heard in our Gospel just now, is, in many ways, an extra-ordinary story that's different from almost every other part of the Gospels, and yet, it is told by three of the four Evangelists, so it must have been a significant event. It leads us to ask why?

The cue might be that each of these three Gospel writers precedes their telling of the Transfiguration with two other events. First, the question Jesus asked of the Apostles: "Who do people say I am?" and then directly, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter responds with the assertion: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus praises Peter for his response, saying that it wasn't flesh and blood that had revealed this to him, but his Father in heaven. But then Jesus follows that immediately with the prediction of his Passion and Death, a prediction that meets with utter dismay and disbelief.

It is reasonable to assume that, in part, the Transfiguration took place as a response to their disbelief, but also to strengthen and comfort Jesus himself in preparation for the suffering which he was to undergo.

From their Jewish history Jesus knew that most prophets in the past had to experience a great deal of suffering during their life, and didn't die comfortable in their beds, and considering the criticism and opposition he was already experiencing from the Scribes and Pharisees, he knew that this was to be his lot as well. He needed time and opportunity to reflect and pray about this, and that would have been the main reason why he climbed Mt. Tabor, taking Peter, James and John with him.

As soon as they reached the top, Jesus began to pray, while the Apostles had a breather. During that time of prayer a change came over Jesus, that could only be described as dazzling, while two prominent figures from the Old Testament appeared to him, - Moses and Elijah, who, as St. Luke tells us, spoke to him about his forthcoming passion. That would have reassured Jesus, but more importantly, Jesus experienced the presence of his Father, and heard again the wonderful affirmation he had also heard at

his Baptism: "You are my beloved Son, I am pleased with you", and for the benefit of the Apostles: "Listen to him!"

On Mt. Tabor Jesus felt himself comforted, reassured, affirmed and strengthened for the ordeal ahead. It wasn't that everything became rosy, - in fact, nothing changed. He still had to face a dark and threatening future. But he knew that somehow this was what the Father wanted from Him, and that God would give him the strength to face it.

As far as the Apostles were concerned, they were overawed by the experience, and wanted it to continue, - hence Peter's offer to build three tents there, "one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." But that was not to be. As the vision faded away, they found themselves alone with Jesus, very much strengthened and excited by what they had seen, and eager to talk about it and share it with the other apostles. So Jesus had to caution them not to speak about the vision until after the Resurrection.

The Transfiguration prepared Peter, James and John for the suffering that was to come, especially the Agony in the Garden, of which they were again the chosen witnesses. Without that vision they might well have lost faith in Jesus. Even as it was, it did not stop Peter from denying Jesus, but in the end it showed through as Peter remembered how all of this had been foretold, even as late as during the Last Supper, and he went out and cried bitterly at his failure of trusting Jesus in all that had been given him.

For us the Transfiguration is reassurance as well, - not only that our faith is founded on evidence that has stood the test of time, but also that we are intimately loved by God, who keeps on supporting us through the ups and downs of life, until we too become sharers in Christ's Resurrection.

Let's keep looking forward to that day!