

My Mountaintop
Homily Feb 18th, '07
Deacon Colleen Spaeth

The story goes something like this, I am sure you have heard it before – a guy is working on his roof, and suddenly loses his balance, slipping down the slope of the roof, finding himself hanging from the edge, dangling like a doll from the roof. Being a person of faith he calls on his Lord to save him, Lord, here I am hanging by a thread, save me. Clearly he hears his God's reply, "Let Go, I've got you." Filled with fear, just a second goes by and he lets out, "Anybody else up there?"

I love to escape – escape from my world, world of stuff, routines, jobs, chores, people who can pull me away from my center, people who want too much of me, more than I am willing to give sometime.

At the same time, I love people, I love my home, my kids, my jobs, I love to listen to people tell their stories. I like to feel that I have a gift, the gift of connecting my heart to the heart of others.

What I know for sure about myself is that I overdo. And I have spent some time now taking a look at how I overdo and how God really wants me to spend my days. It is important, I think, to spend much time in prayer, and then quiet time listening to God's responses.

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Today we observe the Last Sunday after Epiphany. This week we will enter into the season of Lent, a time when we put away the Alleluias, and hopefully avail ourselves of the opportunities to spend time in prayer and quiet, together with others, and together just God and ourselves.

And today in scripture we hear of Jesus and a few of his buddies escaping to the mountain to pray and be still, together. We hear of transformation, a changing, visible changing of Jesus on the mountaintop, a transfiguration, the holiness of Jesus is something that can be touched and felt. The time together is of Jesus and his friends, a time of prayer and solidarity. Moments of transformation begin with moments of prayer.

It is a mountaintop experience and prayer is at the center. I am sure we can all agree that we can stop anytime during our day and pray, anywhere, in the car, in the kitchen, in the office, we can stop and pray anywhere. Certainly Jesus could have, couldn't he? But he chose this time, this story setting to go to the mountain and pray. It seems to me this is something very important not to be lost on us. Where is our prayer place? Where do we sneak off to – where do we find time to say our prayers?

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Where is that special place where you and I can feel God's presence in an especially powerful way? Where is that place with maybe a few of our friends we can go and pray? Is it a beach, a lake, the woods, a monastery? could it be our own sanctuary? When you enter this place on Sunday morning, can you hear and feel the peace of God that surpasses all understanding? Can you point to it? Can you climb up on the lap of your God and together with those with whom you worship, can you feel your own transformation? Moments of transformation begin with moments of prayer. Surely Jesus shows us that.

Jesus could have gone to the mountain by himself, but Luke tells us that he chose to bring three of his disciples with him. Sometimes we pray alone, but here in this story we have another way, that of solidarity instead of solitude.

I wonder if there isn't something very special about praying with and in the presence of others. Something very intimate about inviting others to be with us when we journey into prayer.

As we enter Lent, might it be helpful if we adopted a new discipline and consider being part of a prayer group. Moments of transformation begin with moments of prayer. How would our lives be transformed if we sought each other out to pray with? We are quick to

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trade recipes for great cookies, to watch movies together, to vacation together – when was the last time we reached out to one another in prayer? How seriously do we take our prayer list? Is it enough that we pray together on Sundays, or should our Sunday prayer be just the beginning of our discipline of prayer?

Lent can be a time of focus, a time of discipline and growth. What if we took on a new attitude and included prayer with each other as a daily activity? How could that change us? How could we be transformed?

Staying alert and focused was a problem even for the disciples that day on the mountaintop, they fought off their sleepiness, and Luke tells us that while they were sleepy, they stayed awake, and because they stayed awake, they experienced Jesus in all his glory. They didn't miss it.

What are we missing as we travel through our days tired and sleepy? What are we missing as we move from one memorized routine to the next? Where is Jesus? What can we do to be transformed by Jesus?

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It can be a good thing to set aside a specific time to pray, a time when you're not sleepy or hurried. What about inviting others to also set the same time aside, whether it's morning or evening, to pray in their homes at the same time? Moments of prayer bring about moments of transformation. Prayer partners – that's what others can be – we only need to ask. It just takes our time. What's that you say, we have no extra time? How about giving up the morning paper? How about giving up that favorite TV show - how about a walk, this time in silent prayer with your best friend. None of us have huge spaces of day, but all of us have moments – moments that can change us and our attitudes – moments that can polish the gems that are our hearts and turn them to God for his use.

Peter was moved by what he witnessed on the mountaintop that day. “Master, it is good for us to be here, let us make three dwellings: One for your, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Peter had experienced the holy, Jesus' transfiguration and Peter was transformed himself. Peter wanted to honor the moment, freeze it in time, preserve it. I wonder if most of us aren't like Peter, when we come face to face with the holy we want to hang on to it, but the truth is that holy moments can be fleeting, we can't hold on to them, and yet somehow they stay with us because we are changed forever. They live on in our hearts. We can remember our holy moments with a sense of wonder knowing that

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God is very near. Peter's encounter was not tranquil, but filled with turmoil – and we hear they were all overshadowed by a cloud, and at the moment of fear, God spoke – God spoke – “this is my chosen, my beloved, listen to him.”

The scripture this morning carries the foreboding that makes for indelible memories. Whatever this strange event of Transfiguration means, it made such an impression on the gospel writers that years later they could still recall the event. The story of the Transfiguration appears in all three gospels and with little variation. That means it floated around in many forms and parchments before finally coming to settle in Luke's gospel. The transfiguration is an indelible memory of the church.

And it's not just a prayer meeting or just a mountain top experience. The story in Luke's gospel holds out two principal qualities for our faith. First, Jesus is God's Chosen One; to have Jesus is to have hope and love and joy and healing and laughter, new life, fresh starts and forgiveness and God's abiding presence.

And secondly, following Jesus will not always take us down the freeway with the speedometer on cruise control, but also down the back roads that lead through suffering, pain, rejection, death and always always to resurrection.

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Yesterday I spent the day with my sisters cleaning out my mom's condo getting it ready to sell. We thought we would accomplish much more than we actually did. It took us all afternoon to just clean out the kitchen cabinets. My mother did not have much fancy stuff. But as we packed the white cups with little flowers on them we remembered our late night tea clatches. As we packed the forks and knives we remembered and shared stories meals at her table with each other. As I cleaned out the cabinet way up over the refrigerator where you put stuff you never never ever need or use, I found the old pewter bowl that my mother always placed on our childhood kitchen table filled with apples, our afternoon snack. My sisters and I were transformed by our indelible memories, and filled with gratitude. And in our gratitude there was quiet prayer, moments of prayer that made our bond together stronger. What is gratitude, after all, if not prayer turned inside out?

Jesus set the bar for us in so many ways – one of the main ways was to find time to get away from the rat race and pray, alone and together. It should be who we are, a part of the tread of the tapestry we call life. It is what being a Christian is all about, isn't it?

Maya Angelou had this to say about Christians.

“When I say ... 'I am a Christian' I'm not shouting I'm clean livin.' I'm whispering I was lost – Now I'm found and forgiven.

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When I say I'm a Christian, I don't speak of this with pride, I'm confessing that I stumble and need Christ to be my guide.

When I say I am a Christian, I'm not trying to be strong, I'm professing that I'm weak and need His strength to carry on.

When I say I am a Christian – I'm not bragging of success. I'm admitting I have failed and need God to clean my mess.

When I say I am a Christian I'm not claiming to be perfect, my flaws are far too visible, but God believes I am worth it.

When I say I am a Christian, I still feel the sting of pain, I have my share of heartaches, so I call upon His name.

When I say I am a Christian, I'm not holier than thou, I'm just a simple sinner who received God's good grace somehow!"

Prayer doesn't and can't change our realities, but it does and can change how our realities affect us. We can chose to be transformed by the realities or defeated by them. And through it all God will be God. The question is Who will we be?

Blessed Lent!