

Second Sunday of Lent, year B
March 4, 2012

This morning we shall hear stories of two mountains, and two beloved sons. The first is from the book of Genesis, and concerns Abraham and his firstborn son, Isaac.: Abraham and his wife Sarah had heard the voice of God promising them offspring “as many as the stars of heaven and innumerable grains of sand.” Now God calls Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his first-born son. How can we explain this mystery? In Psalm 116 the author says, “I kept my faith, even when I said, “I am greatly afflicted.”” Benedictine Sister Verna Holyhead offers this explanation: “God takes the risk that Abraham will respond obediently. Abraham takes the risk that God will provide. Neither will fail each other.”¹ Our present sensitivity may find the story very strange. We may ask ourselves, “To what depth am I willing to say, (as we so very often say,) “thy will be done”?”

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” On another mountain, many generations later, another son of Abraham is revealed as Son of God!

We heard in the Gospel, “After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain, apart by themselves.”² Where was this mountain? A good candidate is Mount Tabor, roughly 30 miles south and west from the Sea of Galilee. In the summer of 1971 I had been studying in Athens and was invited by a former student to spend a week in the Holy Land. Abbot Alban gave permission and off I went, from Athens. I remember traveling from Jerusalem to Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, something like three hours on the bus; much much longer by foot, the way Jesus travelled. One morning, from Tiberias, I took a bus to Nazareth, some miles to the west. On the return bus I asked the driver if he stopped at Mount Tabor. The driver said it was not a regular stop but he could drop me off there if I wished. I wished, and found myself at the bottom of a long upward trail. A very long upward trail. I anticipated finding a peak, but after an hour and a half or so, I was still in the woods. In the woods indeed! “Well,” I said to myself, “the Transfiguration could have happened in a grassy place as well as a mountain top!”. So I said a prayer there and walked back to the road, then hitch-hiked back to Tiberias.

The internet teaches me that the east side of Mount Tabor is rockier and steeper. The supposed site of the Transfiguration is there, on a height from which can be seen the Sea of Galilee.

“And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.”³ Elijah and Moses were seen, talking with Jesus. Peter in his excitement wants to turn the place into a festival, with booths for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. Then a cloud comes, casting a shadow over them, and from the cloud a voice saying, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Then in an instant they were back to “normal.”

By the Father’s will this beloved Son would be beaten, tortured and crucified on the hill of Calvary. By the Father’s will he rose triumphantly, true Son of God, true human son.

Our journey to Easter is something like a mountain climb. Who knows what encounters we may have as we seek a deeper fidelity to God? We find strength in the stirring words of St. Paul in our second reading : “If God is for us, who can be against us?”⁴ Let me happily say that statement reminds me of the great St Louis Jesuits song, in 1975, by Fr. John Foley: “If God is for us, who can be against, if the Spirit of God has set us free? “, with the verse: “I know that nothing in this world can ever take us from His love.”⁵

Wherever we are, Lent calls us to go deeper, encouraged by St. Paul’s stirring words:

“Christ Jesus it is, who died, or rather, was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.”⁶

Fr. Hilary Hayden

1 Verna A. Holyhead, S.G.S., *Welcoming the Word in Year Two*, 35

2 *The Gospel of Mark*, 9:2

3 *Ibid.*, verse 5

4 *Romans* 8: 31b

5 Fr. John Foley, SJ, in *Glory & Praise, Parish Music Program*. p.51, *If God is for us*

6 *Romans* 8:34b