

Roughly 15 years ago, while stationed in northern Japan, I had the opportunity to ascend Mt. Fuji in Japan.

Mt. Fuji is the highest peak in Japan, and to the Japanese is known as one of the “Three Holy Mountains.” It is also a World Heritage Cultural site and an international Historic Site of Special Beauty.

The peak of Mt. Fuji is 12,388 feet above sea level ... which is about two and one-third miles up. I have to confess, that I didn’t climb the entire mountain. Like most tourists, my group started at the 5th station, which is located better than half-way up ... at 7,550 feet. Nonetheless, the average hiker takes from 3 to 8 hours to get from the fifth station to the top. We stopped at the ninth station for the night and woke up early the next morning so that we could be at the summit in time to observe the sunrise from the peak.

It was a “once in a lifetime” sort of experience, partially because I no longer live in Japan ... and partially because it was a very difficult task ... despite being with a group of friends ... and all of us urging each other to keep going.

In today’s reading from St. Matthew, we hear the familiar Gospel story of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Tabor. Tabor is about one-sixth the height of Mt. Fuji ... but at 1,886 feet ... I’m sure that it was still a bit of a climb for Jesus, Peter, James, and John.

But rather than ascending to watch a sunrise, Peter, James, and John witness Jesus transfigured in all the glory of His Divinity, and in the vision - Jesus is speaks to Moses and Elijah regarding His coming Passion and Resurrection.

Mountains have played a significant role in Salvation History. Moses received the Law, written on stone tablets by God’s own hand, on Mt. Sinai. And in the First Book of Kings, Elijah flees the wrath of Jezebel, climbing Mt. Horeb where he waits for God to speak ... When God does speak, it is in the form of a “*still small voice*” asking Elijah “*What are you doing here?*”

Which begs the question ... What are they doing there?

Just prior to this event in the Gospel, Jesus has revealed to His disciples His mission - namely that He will be betrayed, handed over, tortured, and crucified ... and that He will rise on the third day. We can only imagine the confusion this most likely caused among the disciples.

Was this another parable? Was this a prophecy of a future event? What does this all mean?

The disciples ... and the Apostles ... were people like us ... easily distracted, easily confused, practical ... maybe even pragmatic ... in a word - just plain folk.

And Scripture tells us ... over and over again ... that for the most part, Jesus' followers kept missing the point.

And so, in this episode ... in the Transfiguration event ... Jesus not only appears to Peter, James, and John in all His glory and Divine Majesty ... but He has a discussion with Moses - the Giver of the Law ... and with Elijah - the greatest of all the Prophets ... about His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

Most probably, all of what was discussed most likely went right over those three Apostles' heads ... after all, not one of them has transcribed or handed down to us anything of what was said ... in fact, neither Matthew nor Mark even say what they were discussing. Only Luke tells us that Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah about “[H]is exodus that [H]e was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.”

But we all know that old saying, “*a picture is worth a thousand words.*” And while none of them remembered what was said on that mountain, what they did remember was what they saw.

And even with the vision, and hearing the voice of God saying “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to [H]im.*” ... When the time came for all of this to happen ... Peter denied that he even knew Jesus, James ran away with the others, and only John stayed at the foot of the Cross.

And that brings us to the bottom line in all of this: the Cross.

Here we are, 10 days into Lent 2014. How are our penances going? How are we holding up? If we recall in the Stations of the Cross, Jesus falls three times before making it to His own crucifixion on Golgatha - another mountain. Yet despite His struggles with fulfilling His mission ... each time, He gets back up and carries on.

And so must we. No matter how we are doing with our own burdens this Lent ... we must pick up our cross and follow Jesus.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ let us heed the words of St. Paul and “[b]ear [our] share of hardship for the [G]ospel ... with the strength that comes from God.”

Let us take up our cross and follow Him ... all the way ... all the time. Remembering that, as St. Paul tells us: “[Jesus] save[s] us and call[s] us to a holy life”. And so let us rely on “*the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus*”.

Let us “*place our trust in*” God ... knowing that His love and His mercy and His grace are all the strength that we need to persevere in our own mission.