

Dear Friends,

Climbing a mountain can be a lonely business. Yet we don't know that there are no other people climbing the mountain on another side. It is only at the top of the mountain that we might discover other people have been heading for the same place. The mountain turns out to be the place of convergence. Dante in his great poem, *The Divine Comedy*, sees Purgatory as being like a mountain, which we must climb, until we are purged of our sins on the way up. The mountain is a tough climb, until we are purged of our sins, and then suddenly we may make our way to the top with ease. At the top, all are gathered together in the wonder of God and the fulfilment for which we were brought into being.

The three apostles certainly did not expect to find Moses and Elijah at the top of the mountain, yet who else should we expect to find at the end of the journey? Christ is the fulfilment of the law and prophecy, not just in Judaism but in all human endeavors. We are always seeking a law to teach us how to live together, we are always looking for some call to something higher than this life. This is the meaning of law and prophecy, and Jesus completes them both as they find their unity and fulfilment in Christ.

Why did Peter offer to build tents for the three – Jesus, Moses and Elijah? Perhaps he expected Jesus to ascend into heaven alongside Moses and Elijah. So in saying, "it is wonderful for us to be here," perhaps he was really telling to Jesus, "Stay with us, Lord."

This may well be how Jesus was interpreted by some, as one of the ancient figures of the Old Testament having returned to earth. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke make it clear that Jesus was born of a woman. He had not come back from the dead. Yet here on the mountain of transfiguration, he seemed to be just such a superhuman figure and, even more, associating with superhuman figures. Perhaps indeed Peter expected him to rise up into the air just like Moses and Elijah. So building tents for them would seem like a compromise. The mountain would then become the place where the world could see the divine reality. What Peter did not expect at that moment was that they would descend the mountain together with Jesus, and go back into ordinary life.

Going down from the mountain was difficult for Peter, James and John. They had glimpsed the glorious reality of the one they had chosen to follow, yet now they were going back to the cold, grey world of ordinary life. They were told not to say anything to anyone about what they had seen until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They did not understand what had happened nor the meaning of the words of Jesus. Going down the mountain led to the incident, where the other apostles failed to cure a man's son, who suffered from some sort of epilepsy. Christ said, "Faithless and perverse generation! How much longer must I be with you?" Jesus answers that question at the end of the Gospel, when he sends the disciples out into the world and promised them that "I am with you always; yes, until the end of time."

Before then, he and the disciples would have to continue the struggle thru the frustrating world that they lived in. It would be tempting to say that they were back to reality, but in truth they had left reality behind them on the mountain. It is this world that is full of illusions, fooling us into thinking that it is more real than heaven. Yet it is in this world of illusory rewards that we make our way to heaven. Faith tells us that there is nothing ordinary. Faith transfigures our ordinary lives.

Your friend in Jesus
Msgr. Zach