

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

In A High Place

Lent is not all ashes, on the floor. It also takes a path to a high place. It is a season which calls us to raise our eyes to the mountain. The ascent of Moriah (the place of Abraham's testing), of Tabor (the Mount of Transfiguration) and of Calvary are all evoked in the Lenten pilgrimage. Our way leads upwards, and Lent is full of effort. At its end will come the lifting-up of Jesus, the raising of the dead, the Ascension to the right hand of God. To that, all these clambering struggles finally give way.

Reaching Summits

One of the phrases that keeps coming from mountaineers is that they feel they have reached "the top of the world". Surely that is the feeling they seek, for which they endure the sharp edges and wet ropes and risks among the rocks. To reach that magical vanishing-point, the summit, is to enjoy an exaltation that is comprehensive: you can enjoy it with at least four senses, and it gives you a glimpse of the freedom of God. There is a Dolomite called Antelao, (m.3,263) also known as "il trono de' Dei" (*throne of the Gods*). I'm sure the phrase doesn't mean it's shaped like an armchair, but that from the summit you can sense the sovereignty of the Divine.

Humanity Transfigured

Some of these thoughts must surround the image of the transfigured Lord in today's Gospel. The disciples' climb to the summit is greeted by an overwhelming vision of what the man they follow really is. I wonder if he often made them climb? For the text says *he took them*; he selected them especially, and they followed him to the summit, and *then they saw*. A unique moment of strenuous walking? Hardly. I guess that they often found themselves going upwards – whenever they wanted to be alone. Perhaps it was already an unspoken call for them to join him in prayer: Luke tells us he had chosen them all at the beginning, after a night of prayer on the mountain; and we know that it was his custom to go up into the Mount of Olives at night, to pray. That is how he comes to Gethsemane, where the Gospels tell us *he fell on his face* and prayed. Here in Lent, therefore, the Church presents us with extremes of prayer: the humility of submission, and the extremest exaltation. Both are prayer, and we need the whole gamut that lies between them; because every moment is fit for prayer, no matter where it

lies on the measure of our emotions. If Lent includes the harnessing and governing of our life, then our whole capacity for experience must be integrated.

Holy Mountain

One of the oldest names for God, associated with Abraham and with his ancestors (it is not Jewish) was *Elyon*, which we translate as *God Most High*. We can see the notion alive in the Exodus story, where Israel is summoned to meet God at the Holy Mountain (Sinai). The drama of Moses' ascent of Sinai to speak with God reminds us that Elijah too walked (for forty days and nights) to the same mountain, and had a vision of God there which renewed his mission. In the Transfiguration, both Moses and Elijah are present, making Tabor into the Sinai of the New Testament; except that now it is Jesus that they see, and to whom they bear witness.

Tell No-one The Vision

The strange command of Jesus, not to reveal what they have seen until after the Resurrection, parallels his instructions to receivers of miracles. We are to think of him, not as a wonder-worker, but as the risen Lord of life. It is therefore appropriate that we should contemplate the vision here, in the shadow of Ash Wednesday and the desert temptation. When we sense the presence of death in ourselves, we can turn to the vision of life in him. *Fr Philip*