

On the Transfiguration

The Lord is Calling me to Scale the Mountain

VATICAN CITY, February 24, 2013 - Here is the translation of Pope Benedict XVI's final Angelus address delivered on Sunday to thousands of pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square

Dear brothers and sisters!

Thank you for your affection!

Today, the second Sunday of Lent, we have a particularly beautiful Gospel, that of the Lord's transfiguration. The evangelist Luke especially emphasizes the fact that Jesus is transfigured while he prays: Jesus' is a profound experience of relationship with the Father during a kind of spiritual retreat on a high mountain together with Peter, James, and John, the 3 disciples who are always present in the moments of the Master's divine manifestations (Luke 5:10, 8:51, 9:28). The Lord, who a short time ago foretold his death and resurrection (Luke 9:22), offers to his disciples an anticipation of his glory. And in the transfiguration too, as in the baptism, the voice of the heavenly Father resounds: "This is my Son, the chosen one. Listen to him!" (Luke 9:35). The presence then of Moses and Elijah, who represent the Law and the Prophets of the Old Covenant, is of great significance: the whole history of covenant is ordered to him, the Christ, who accomplishes a new "exodus" (Luke 9:31), not toward the promised land as in the time of Moses, but toward heaven. Peter's words: "Master, how good it is for us to be here" (Luke 9:33), represent the impossible attempt to freeze such a mystical experience. St. Augustine comments: "[Peter] ... on the mountain ... had Christ as the food of his soul. Why should he want to come down to return to toil and suffering while there he was full of sentiments of a holy love for God that inspired him thus to holy actions?" (Sermon 78,3: PL 38,491).

Meditating on this passage of the Gospel, we can take from it a very important teaching. First of all, there is the primacy of prayer, without which all of the work of the apostolate and charity is reduced to activism. During Lent we learn to give the right amount of time to both personal and communal prayer, which gives breath to our spiritual life. Moreover, to pray is not to isolate oneself from the world and its contradictions, as Peter wished to do on Tabor. Prayer, rather, leads us back to the journey, to action. "The Christian life," I wrote in my Message for this Lent, "consists in continuously scaling the mountain to meet God and then coming back down, bearing the love and strength drawn from him, so as to serve our brothers and sisters with God's own love" (n. 3).

Dear brothers and sisters, I hear this Word of God addressed to me in a special way during this moment of my life. Thank you! The Lord is calling me to "scale the mountain," to dedicate myself still more to prayer and to meditation. But this does not mean abandoning the Church – on the contrary, if God asks this of me, it is to serve the Church with the same dedication and the same love with which I have tried to do so hitherto, but in a way that is more adapted to my age and my strength. Let us invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary: may she help us always to follow the Lord Jesus in prayer and in active charity.

[Following the recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father greeted those present in different languages. In Italian he said:]

Dear brothers and sisters!

Thank you! Let us thank the Lord for the little bit of sun that he has given us!