

The Second Sunday of Lent
March 12, 2017

There's an important word that might easily be overlooked in our gospel passage today. And that word is, "Behold!" It means more than "Look!" It's more like "Take a really good look, and then look again, because there is more here than you can understand." It's significant that the word wasn't used for the description of the change in Jesus' appearance. Instead, the word was used draw the attention of the disciples to the arrival of Moses and Elijah.

"Behold! Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him." It's both interesting and important to note that the disciples received a vision of the greatest prophet and the greatest law-giver conversing with Jesus. It's as if to tell the disciples, "Behold, this Jesus whom you know is rooted in the best, the deepest of your Jewish tradition."

Moses and Elijah "were conversing with him," making it seem as if they were consulting, as if he were the revelation they had been awaiting.

Their presence is even more mysterious because they are two whose fame includes the fact that nobody saw them die – and they were conversing with the one who would overcome death.

We also heard "Behold! From the cloud came a voice." From that moment on, the disciples were empowered to speak like prophets, so that like the prophet Jeremiah they could say, "The word of God came to me and declared that Jesus is God's beloved Son. We must listen to him."

What the disciples beheld on the mountaintop was what we often call a "mountain experience." It was a moment when they understood the truth of who Jesus was in a way that was deeper than words could express.

No miracle, no preaching, no philosophical argument could have produced the interior conviction that such an encounter brought to Peter, James and John.

It was probably a bit like falling in love, it was a life-changing experience that couldn't be pinned down any more than Jesus, Moses and Elijah could be housed in tents on the hill like Peter suggested. In the truest sense of the phrase, you had to be there.

Most people of faith have at least a few mountaintop moments in their life, times when they know that God is near, that love is the ultimate value, that faith is worth the risk, and sometimes that faith is a promise that demands that we risk everything.

Abraham had a mountaintop moment when God called him from his homeland to go off into a most improbable future, a future in which he and Sarah, without any real hope for having children, would become the parents of a people of God too numerous to count.

St. Paul had the same kind of experience when he was stopped short in his persecution of the early Christians.

We can only see what we are open to seeing. There's more of God around us than we can take in, but we can also miss it all. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain after they had been with him, after they had been

captivated with the force of his goodness and then confused and terrified by his prediction that he would suffer rejection and a shameful death.

They loved him and that was enough to open them to more. They were ready to begin to behold who he was in the sight of God. All that was left was to learn to listen to him.

This second week of Lent invites us to behold the Christ of our tradition, to remember our peak moments of faith, and most of all, to listen to him.