

Have you ever read a passage from scripture and had it remind you of something you'd seen or heard in your own time? That happened to me this week as I read once again the Transfiguration story as recorded in Luke. I found myself thinking back to Martin Luther King on what turned out to be the night before he was killed. "I have been to the mountain top," King said that fateful night, "and I have *seen*."

We now know, of course, that this mountain-top experience came to King only after tremendous doubt and anxiety. Those who knew him well say he spent what turned out to be the closing weeks of his life exploring the very depths of his understanding of who he was and what he was called to do. But now, on that "mountain top" the vision was clear. And once more he was able to face what had to be faced. The anxiety was over – he was strengthened.

This very much parallels the mountain-top experience of our Lord we call the Transfiguration. Our Lord had also been doing a lot of thinking and praying about who he was and what was to come in his life. Ever since the voice of God spoke to him at his baptism and he received his commission, he had been tested. His first test came in the wilderness in the story we hear each year at the beginning of Lent. Then, he faced the challenge of going out among the crowds – and, particularly, the challenge raised by returning to his hometown, where he faced rejection and even forced expulsion.

And now, his disciples were beginning to discern who he was. Peter had only eight days before this incident confessed, "You are the Christ." But still, you get a sense that Jesus was uncomfortable. Peter really *didn't* understand. And maybe even *Jesus* didn't. Why suffering? Why death? Is that really God's way?

So now they go to the mountain top. Jesus and the inner circle of his disciples ascend the mountain to rest and to pray, to share sorrow and joy – perhaps to eat, to be quiet. Jesus struggles in his inner self. What will happen? *How* will it happen? Can I face it? Certainly our Lord must have dealt with such questions if he was fully human as the Church has always proclaimed.

Suddenly, in the midst of the inner turmoil, something happened; something which lies beyond our powers to explain, yet which was very real. *Everything became clear*. And there, once again, was the voice of God, the same voice heard the day he was

baptized: “This is my beloved Son – listen to him.” Everything was now plain. There was power and light to meet the approaching darkness.

Jesus the Teacher was now clearly Jesus the Son of God, the one who is fully God and fully human. In that experience, our Lord is made aware of who he is and what his mission is; that there is something beyond the suffering and death that is about to come.

Now what does all this have to do with us? We’re not Jesus. We’re not even Martin Luther King. No – but we *are* human. And, to *be* human is to experience difficult feelings and emotions. To be human is to think about, as Jesus did, as Martin Luther King did, who we are and what we are. To be human is to face the reality of suffering. And yes, it is to face the reality that we die. Who among us hasn’t thought at some time or other about how we’re going to die, or how we’re going to face it, or if it is going to hold off until we’re satisfied that we have filled our life’s calling?

This “wondering” about who we are can even extend to the relationships in our lives. We all have our day to day stresses, our difficulties, be they at work or at home. We all face difficult decisions and moral choices and any number of options as to how our lives are to be lived. To be human is to face such things – to face them even as Jesus did. And therein lies the message. For Jesus could never have faced all that was destined to come his way had he not *first* made a deliberate space in his life for reflection, for prayer, for going away to a mountain-top to allow God in. That’s really what the Transfiguration was all about.

Right now, you may be wondering, “What time away? Who has the time to withdraw for reflection and prayer?” Don’t you think, with crowds closing in on him from every side, Jesus asked the same thing? He got away, he took that time, because he *disciplined himself* to do so. He knew he needed it, and so, even when difficult to carve out, he did it. Friends, we need that, too. We need time in our lives when we withdraw from everything we are currently facing – not to *escape*, not to *shirk our responsibilities*, but to be *strengthened* for them.

The call placed before us by the story of the Transfiguration is that we all need time to be with our God who shares in our sufferings and our sorrows; to be with our God who is with us on the heights as well as in the depths. That is where we experience the liberating power of Christ. That’s the mountain-top to which we go “*so we can see.*”

Ultimately, to go to the mountain-top is to be, ourselves, transfigured. We go away to our place of retreat to be, ourselves, changed. Changed, strengthened, transformed by the living Christ, we then become able not only to face what life has to offer, but to find meaning in it. We come down off our mountain with courage to come out a better person for having had the experience. Don't take these words lightly. It is important – vital – to who you are, how you cope, how you live, how you creatively deal with life's tensions and problems.

“I have been to the mountain-top and I have seen.” Go. And see. Amen.