

Last week, the Gospel spoke about the desert where Jesus spent forty days. It was a Sunday to speak about the call of the desert: fasting, prayer and almsgiving, the tools of our Lenten warfare.

This week, the Gospel speaks not about the call of the desert but the call of the mountain, the call to union with God. A mountaintop is one of the great places on earth. The mountaintop experience recounted in today's Gospel was a stunning one for Peter, James and John. They had a glimpse of the glory and the truth about Jesus. There they heard the words of the Father, "Listen to Him."

It was a rough trip to the mountain of the Transfiguration. Their journey began when Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus explained that the Messiah had to suffer and die and only then rise. The disciples must have felt like someone had just kicked them in the stomach. It was as if they just found out that their best friend was dying of terminal illness with only a few days to live.

The account of the Transfiguration begins with the phrase, "Six days later." For six days they carried this news of Jesus' impending death around inside of them. But on the seventh day, Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain. There, on that seventh day on the mountaintop they saw the glory. Here, on this seventh day, on the mountain of the Christian Sabbath, we are given a chance to get the bigger picture, the deeper view.

Couple years ago, the Holy Father gave us a magnificent reflection, called "The Day of the Lord" on the meaning of Sunday in our Catholic life.

He calls Sunday the fundamental feast day. On Sunday, he writes, Easter returns to us week after week when we relive the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus where they came to recognize Jesus in the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread. Every Sunday returns us to the true center of world history and of human life, the Lord's Resurrection. Unfortunately, today, Sunday gets absorbed into what is called the "weekend" and becomes a "catch-up" day, but it can be so much more than that.

It is, first of all, a chance to experience the grand and majestic work of God's creation. It is a day to enjoy the fruits of our labor and to enjoy family, friends.

Sunday is also the Day of Christ when we hear the word of the Lord, apply it to our life and receive the Lord in the Eucharist. It is a time to see our life in the light of Jesus' Death and Resurrection and recall that, in everything we do, we are called to be disciples of Jesus.

Sunday is, thirdly, the Day of the Church when we are reminded that we are part of a community of faith, that our life is part of the Church's life and that the Church's life, her concerns, problems and successes, should be part of our life.

We can say that Mass, is the heart of Sunday. Just as the heart pumps life into the rest of the body, so the Mass pumps Christ's life into the Church and into our life. The Day of the Creator, the Day of Christ and the Day of the Church: Sunday is all of these. It is our time on the mountain when we get a larger vision, put things into perspective and breathe a cleaner air. But, it takes effort to get here.

Whatever we are doing this Lent, we should resolve that weekly Mass attendance will be part of our lives. It is time when we come close to the Lord, come to hear His truth, experience His Eucharist, join our prayer to His sacrifice, grasp the big picture, renew our discipleship, profess in the Creed the non-negotiable truths that bind us together, come to know something of God's light and convey something of that light to a dark world.

We are all called every week to the mountain of prayer at Sunday Mass. Here we learn to leave behind the false gods as Abraham did in today's first reading. Here we can come to know the grace of a new and eternal life to which St. Paul refers. Here, we receive something of Christ's power to guide us in difficult days as Jesus says to us, as He does in the Gospel, "Rise and do not be afraid."

Sunday Mass is one of the defining badges of Catholic identity and a thermometer of how serious we are about our Catholicism. That is why we should not miss Mass unless prevented from coming. Some people say, "Well, I don't have to go to church on Sunday. I can pray to God in the forest." Maybe they can but they don't. Of course, we can do both.

We experience at Mass the cleansing, renewing power of Christ through Word and Sacrament. Here we have the assured presence of Christ. Here we have more than a time of personal prayer. Here we join our prayer to the prayer of the Church.

Jesus has no need any more to be transfigured or changed. He is now in glory.

We still need transformation. The Lord doesn't need Sunday. We do.