

2nd Sunday in Lent

Genesis 15: 5 – 12, 17 – 18 Philippians 3: 17 – 4:1 Luke 9: 28 - 36

If I were asked to nominate the “highlights” of my time at Mount Eliza so far, the various pilgrimages that we have done would be way up there. These have included trips to Turkey, Israel, the Top End and Centre of Australia.

Certainly our trip to the Holy Land in 2012 was memorable for me. It was my third visit but the first time I had travelled with my sister. Our group from the parish was a terrific one and we thoroughly enjoyed one another. But if you asked the 35 members of the group what was their “highlight” you might get 35 different answers.

I think my most lasting memory about the Holy Land is of sailing on the Sea of Galilee. On that trip in 2012 there was live music on board. But previously it was the quiet and peacefulness that really touched me – this was the lake on which Jesus sailed, the water upon which he walked. Those are the hills and mountains where he taught and preached. And I just loved the Old City of Jerusalem – crowded, noisy, unchanging.

But certainly Mount Tabor was also so very unforgettable. Probably the only rudeness we experienced during the whole couple of weeks of our Parish Pilgrimage was from one of the taxi drivers who was marshalling people at the transit station at the foot of the mountain. I reckon I know why he was such a grump. These guys must live on their nerves. The road up the mountain is steep and twisting, and the taxi drivers are crazy; they clearly enjoy putting the wind up the tourists and with this tourist they have been spectacularly successful every time.

But apart from that, Mount Tabor is a graceful, isolated mountain in Lower Galilee. It rises almost 600 metres above the valley; its dome-like shape is eye-catching and the panoramic views from its summit among the most stunning in the land. One writer has described Tabor as “rising up to heaven like an altar in the greatest sanctuary in the world.” Such imagery, and still more the constant flow of pilgrims throughout the centuries, bears testimony to the fact that Tabor has traditionally been identified as the spot where today’s gospel event took place.

Jesus is deep in prayer; nearby his three disciples are dozing off – the day has been hot and the climb exhausting – no taxis then ! Perhaps they were lucky !! Suddenly they witness an incredible sight. It's their Master; they've seen him lost in prayer before, but never anything like this: his face is radiant, even his clothing suffused with light. Then they notice that two other men are joining him. One is Moses, leader and lawgiver of God's people, and the other Elijah, the great prophet. (Today, the Franciscan church on the summit of Mount Tabor is flanked by two side chapels, dedicated to those two Old Testament heroes). More amazing than their presence, however, is their topic of conversation: they are talking with Jesus, says the gospel, "of his passing which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem" – a "passing" which will involve his death and resurrection. Peter is awe-struck. "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here," he exclaims. Let's **not** go up to Jerusalem !!

But the words are scarcely out of his mouth when a cloud – a biblical symbol of God's presence – overshadows them and from the cloud the voice of the Father is heard: "This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him." After that, all is back to normal; Jesus, no longer ablaze with glory but the familiar Jesus they knew so well. Now they are to accompany him on a journey which will take him to his death in Jerusalem. However, they will never be able to forget, will never **want** to forget, that astonishing event on Mount Tabor; it had given them a glimpse of Jesus' real identity as the beloved Son of the Father. It will stand them in good stead in the dark days ahead.

However as time went by they came to see that there was even more to Mount Tabor than they had realised..... as today's readings suggest we, too, should realise. For not only had it given them a glimpse of who Jesus was, but also what we, his followers, are destined to be. In the words of St. Paul, "the Lord Jesus will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body". Some years ago an horrific explosion in Belfast robbed a young girl of an arm, a leg and an eye. She made an amazing recovery, and was married a year later. Many newspapers carried "before" and "after" photographs, showing the incredible transformation that had been worked, thanks to the skills of surgeons, doctors and nurses. So what may we not expect when the Lord himself is at work ? For , as St. Paul reminds us, God has at his disposal limitless power, "the same power with which he can subdue the whole universe".

As though reflecting on the importance of what happened on Mount Tabor, Paul cries out that “our (real) homeland is in heaven”; that’s where we truly belong for we are a pilgrim people, that’s where we shall be finally transfigured into the likeness of our risen Lord. And that’s why our supreme task, especially during these days of Lent, is to ensure that we are treading the right path, or, if we are not, to make the necessary adjustments while there is time.