

JJ¹

The 2018 Winter Olympics are in full swing. Some of my favorites events are the downhill events. Athletes flying down the side of a mountain at 80+ miles an hour, in my opinion, is something you don't want to miss.

Today in the Gospel, we find some spiritual athletes in training going up a mountain, but instead of seeing how fast they can get down the mountain like olympians, we see that they want to stay on top. Friends, today we travel along with them, and **YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS THIS.**

It's been six days, but the wound is still raw in Peter's heart. Six days earlier, Peter heard the most stunning words he ever had or ever would hear in his life: "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but the things of men" (Mk. 8:33). Peter had just tried to keep Jesus from going to the cross. He didn't yet know what it all meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. Peter believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but from his youth his mind had been filled with earthly ideas about the Savior, that he would be an earthly king. In his sinful heart, Peter also wanted something other than pain and suffering for his dear Rabbi and for himself. He wanted glory, not the cross.

Had the lesson sank in yet? No, it hadn't. It wouldn't finally all sink in until after Jesus' resurrection, really not until Pentecost. But just think how much that rebuke must have hurt! Think of how confused Peter still was! I imagine he wasn't sleeping well either. Then six days later, while in the area of Caesarea Philippi, way in the north of Israel, Jesus tells him and James and John they're going on a field trip. Just the four of them are going up the mountain for devotion and prayer.

It's a long way up. Luke tells us that when the reached the top, the disciples began to doze off while Jesus began to pray. It makes you wonder if they could hear Jesus' prayer. If they could, how in the world could they have been dozing off??? How many things did they almost miss because they were dozing off?

Suddenly, Jesus transfigures before them. It's literally a metamorphosis, like a caterpillar into a butterfly on a divine level. Like the rest of us, Jesus looked like the ordinary, plain, and even sometimes ugly caterpillar. But now, in whom the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form, his glory shines forth! He was shining like the sun and his clothes were dazzling white. And then Moses and Elijah appear!

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about his coming death and resurrection. What a thrill it must have been for them, these men who spent their whole ministries trying to get people ready for the Messiah to come! Moses, the teacher of the law, but so many didn't want to listen to him. Elijah, the preacher of repentance for sins against that law, but so many didn't repent. But now has come the One who fulfills the law. Here is the One who brings repentance and forgiveness. And he's about to do all this by his suffering, death and resurrection. This is what they're talking about. **You wouldn't want to miss that!**

But then Peter opens his mouth, and **you don't want to miss this either.** "Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'

He did not know what to say because they were terrified."

Peter, doesn't know what to say, but he isn't at a loss for words. But then, who could blame him? Who wouldn't want to stay there. They're getting a picture of what heaven will be like. Of course he wanted to stay!



But friends, **this is something you don't want to miss.** Peter is falling into the same wrong thinking he did six days earlier. "...it is good for us to be here." Notice Peter's selfishness. He makes no mention of going down and getting the other disciples so they could join them. "Just us. We three and you, Jesus. Oh, Moses and Elijah too! What fun we could have talking about the Red Sea and Mt. Carmel..." Notice also by saying "us" Peter is including Jesus in this. What a

disaster that would have been had Jesus listened to Peter's earthly thinking. What a disaster it would have been for Jesus to stay on that mountain. "Yeah, okay fine. No redemption." The last time Peter did not have in mind the things of God, Jesus let him have it with both barrels, but not this time. Even though Peter has his head in the clouds of some imagined glory, Jesus doesn't lay into him.

Instead, this time Jesus is going to show him something—Jesus takes away the veil to show them his glory.

And what's their reaction to this? First we're told Peter babbles on, but they're also terrified by it. Often times we might think that it would be nice to see Jesus like that, in his glory, and then it would be easier to follow him. But the disciples' reaction says otherwise. They're terrified.

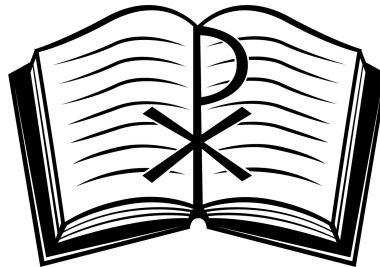
And yet they needed this now to prepare them for what was to come. They needed to see this now to begin setting their hearts and minds on the right path, on the things of God. They needed to see that the life of both Christ and his followers is one of mountaintops and valleys, cross and crown. **And this is something you don't want to miss either.**

The life of a Christian is like riding a roller coaster. There are tragic downs and glorious ups. And the mountaintops are always a preparation for the next valley. For Peter, James and John this literal mountaintop moment was something for them to hold on to when, in a few weeks, they stood at the foot of Jesus' cross. So too with you. God has brought you to mountaintops where you wanted to say with Peter, "It's good to be here. If only it could stay this way!" And he's done that to get you ready for the next valley.

One of the most recent examples in my own life of this came in the Easter season of 2016. If you recall, for the six weeks after Easter my sermons were based on the readings from Revelation. For six weeks we dove into the beautiful promises of our resurrected Lord. I had an absolute blast working on and delivering those sermons. Then I and my family faced the valley of my dad's sickness and death. In the middle of all

that, I and all my family could keep going back to the mountaintop of God's unending, unbreakable promises of our resurrected Lord who promises us our own resurrection on the Last Day.

The same is true for each one of you. You need the valleys so you don't get arrogant and self-reliant. You desperately need the valleys so that you are always reminded of your absolute dependance on God. But you also need the mountaintops so that you don't melt into a puddle of despair. Yet only God knows how to balance those hills and valleys because he's the only one who knows the whole plan for your life.



We've seen Jesus' amazing transfiguration. We've seen Peter's amazing folly. **But there's one more thing you don't want to miss—the**

Father's amazing words, because these words especially help us join those disciples on the mountaintop that day.

A cloud appeared and overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him."

God the Father calls his Son the One he loves, or, his Beloved One. But think how strange that is when you consider what this mountaintop was all about. It wasn't for Jesus. It was for the disciples. It was all about getting the disciples ready for

Jesus' suffering and death. But the Father calls him his Beloved One? Parents, don't you work hard to spare your children some of the pain and struggles you went through? Don't you always want what's best for them? Of course you do. God the Father calls his Son his Beloved One, and what does the Father want for him? Suffering. Death. Hell. Paul's words in Romans 8 perfectly summarizes this thought: "...[God] did not spare his own Son..." (Rom. 8:32).

To call his Son his Beloved, God uses a form of that unique word for love in the Greek we talk about from time to time—*agape*. It is the kind of love that seeks the ultimate good of the person being loved. What is the ultimate good of the Father's love for his Son? You are! What does God want from his Son, his Beloved? Suffering, death, the torments of hell. What does God want from you? "Listen to him!"

Like Peter, James, and John, we need this in our heads and hearts every single day. **YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS THIS** because, like the disciples, we're still spiritual athletes in training. To listen to Jesus, that is where we find Jesus. To listen to our heavenly Father speak to his Beloved Son, that is where we see our God in a manner we can handle. Remember, the disciples were terrified when they saw Jesus in his glory and

were surrounded with that heavy cloud of the Father's presence. What set their hearts at ease? Matthew tells us in his Gospel: "Jesus approached and as he touched them, he said, 'Get up, and do not be afraid.' When they opened their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone" (Mt. 17:7-8).

Even on the mountaintop, Jesus has to tell his disciples, "Don't be afraid." Friends, when you find yourselves on those mountaintops where God's grace in your life is so easy to see, rejoice. But know you can't stay there, not until you reach the heavenly mountain of glory. Yet, as you look at the valleys ahead, or even as you find yourself in the very bottom and in the darkness, remember Jesus. He's the One of whom the heavenly Father said, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him." This is the One who went into the deepest darkest valley for you, all so that you would listen to his Word and believe him when he says, "Don't be afraid." **That is something you don't want to miss.** Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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