

Jesus is Transfigured on Mount Tabor

Six days before the Transfiguration, Jesus told his apostles that he must suffer and die in Jerusalem. No doubt the disciples recognise Jesus' anguish and fear. Then, to Jesus' horror, Peter tries to divert him from his resolve to follow his Father: "Heaven preserve you, Lord; this must not happen to you" (Mt. 16:22). Complex emotions and thoughts unfold in response to this temptation.

Why were Peter's words so tempting? Firstly, Jesus had become close to Peter. This means Peter is in a position of influence. What is more, Jesus trusted Peter – he made him the head of the apostles – yet, Peter is now misusing this trust by using his influence to persuade him from going to the Cross. Secondly, as Christ has taken upon himself our humanity, he feels the natural repugnance to suffering within his human nature. Even before Peter tempted Jesus, he would have struggled with the cost that loving his Father involves. So, Peter's words unleashed something in Jesus which made him feel vulnerable, so vulnerable that he felt this temptation acutely. Thirdly, Jesus is setting out for Jerusalem where he knows he will suffer and die, and the disciples, who now know that Jesus is the Christ, struggle with the alarming disappointment that the Christ is destined to die such a dastardly death. Jesus does not want them to be despairing of him in the event of placing his Father's will before theirs. So, Jesus may have begun to think for a split second that the natural consolation found in human relationships exceeds the level of intimacy he has with his Father. And that on the basis of this deceptive notion, he should abandon his Father's will so as to remain in comfort on earth with his friends. Because Jesus knows his identity within the core of his soul, this temptation shocked him. And in the state of this shock, he turned and said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a *stumbling-block* unto me" (Mt. 16:23 ERV).

Now we are ready to understand why Jesus took Peter, James and John – his three leading apostles – up to Mt Tabor where they can be alone. He wants them to know, contrary to what his temptation suggested, that the level of intimacy he has with his Father far exceeds the natural consolation that can be found in human relationships. They discover this as they see him become transfigured. Moses and Elijah appeared because they represent the Law and the prophets and God had probed the inner parts of their souls similar to Jesus' temptation whereupon they struggled to put love of God above love of neighbour. God probed Moses' soul after being met with the rebellion of the People of God who had worshipped a golden calf (Ex. 32). Elijah's soul had also been probed. He felt like giving up after being met with the resistance of Jezebel who sought to kill him (1 Kgs. 19). Furthermore, like Jesus' profound encounter with his Father on Mt. Tabor, Moses encountered God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 3), and Elijah met God on Mt. Horeb (1 Kgs. 19:9-14) which strengthened them for their missions.