



Mount Tabor

Today we heard a reading about a special high place which has become in the Christian tradition a sacred mountain. Sacred mountains are mountains that are regarded as sacred in themselves as well as those that have become sacred due to their association with a historical figure or event such as Mt. Sinai where Moses went to receive the Law or, as today, Mt. Tabor, where Jesus was transfigured as we heard in our Gospel reading.

The mountains appear in every continent and every culture. Some are shown in photographs on the beam for you to see.:-

**Mt. Agung** is the most sacred mountain in Bali. An active volcano, which last erupted in March 1963. The lava flows but always seems to miss, sometimes by just a few yards, the Mother Temple of Besakih, which is located on the slopes of the sacred mountain.

**Mt. Croagh Patrick**, is a mountain near the town of Westport in County Mayo. Each year, as many as one million pilgrims and visitors make the trek to the top to pray at the stations of the cross, participate in Mass, do penance (in which case the rocky journey is undertaken barefoot) or just enjoy the spectacular view.

**Mt. Fuji, Japan** is revered by Shintoists as sacred to the goddess Sengen-Sama, whose shrine is found at the summit. Named after the Buddhist fire goddess Fuchi, the mountain is believed to be the gateway to another world.

**Mt. Nebo, Jordan** is believed to be the mountain from which Moses viewed the Promised Land and the mountain on which he is buried.

**Mt. Shasta, California**, is a Native American sacred mountain that is now the focus of New Age beliefs.

**Mt. Tai (Tai Shan)** Taoist sacred mountain of the east, Shandong province, China.

**Mt. Emei (Emei Shan)** sacred to Buddhists of the west, Sichuan province, China.

**Uluru/Ayers Rock, Australia** - Although not actually a mountain, this sandstone rock shares the attributes of most sacred mountains - the Aborigines regard it as sacred, associate it with creation, and refrain from climbing it out of respect. Tourists are requested to do the same.

These natural features are exciting, inspiring places and for several reasons. For a start, they offer great vantage points for vision, and they require some commitment or investment of effort from the person climbing. Having got there, such a heightened position does create in us human beings a sense of being able to see ahead, have a vision, take an over-view, look down on ordinary life and see it from a different angle. This is in itself a form of retreat, and place apart, where we can think more profoundly, which, we have to admit, in our ordinary lives, we sometimes, often perhaps, neglect to do.

For our ancestors in the ancient world, these places were majestic, mighty places which seemed to put human life into a new perspective, and often they imagined from their pre-scientific world-view, that the gods, or even God was dwelling in the high places. To climb a mountain was to get nearer to God, a holy activity!

In 2007, Marion and I went to a place near Sydney in Australia where perhaps 40,000 years ago, Aboriginal people had once carved images on to the rocks on the summit of a hill. It wasn't a particularly high hill, but I really felt a heightened sense of perception, and I felt moved by the history of the place, the culture and the lives of the original people who lived there, visible, still tangible, through the marks they had left in the stone, such as animals, fishes and birds.

It is little wonder that so many mountains were regarded as sacred in themselves and also little wonder that people experience strange things on mountains. Today's Gospel reading describes one such experience. Jesus appears transfigured, changed in appearance, and two other people appear with him and talk to him. In the context of theology, this is a simple device to teach the early Christians that Jesus was the Messiah, the one who embodied the Law and the Prophets, symbolised by Moses and Elijah. The author of Luke's gospel writes expressly to demonstrate the authority of Jesus as God's own Son, as he soon will be going south on his final and fateful journey to Jerusalem and death on a cross. One phrase in particular helps us to understand what this was all about.

“Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.  
They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which  
he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.  
(Luke 9: 30-31)

Some scholars have seen in the word “departure” not a reference to death but a reference to the **Exodus**, of which the word **departure** is a synonym. For Luke, Jesus is fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and starting a new Exodus, greater than the first, by which the whole human race will be delivered from the slavery of sin and brought to a promised land of freedom, peace and love.

It is into that promised land that we are invited to travel, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, showing his love, his healing, his compassion and his willingness to take up our cross.