

Homily. August 6, 2017. Feast of the Transfiguration

This past June 3, we all stood in awe as a young man named Alex Honnold rock climbed El Capitan in Yosemite without a rope. It took him only 3 hours and 56 minutes to reach the 3000 foot ledge. This, of course, was not just another climb. He had trained intensely for over a year and engaged in detailed preparation including marking key points with chalk in a preparatory climb with a rope. He had developed over the years in rock climbing an incredible ability to control fear and to remain calm and analytical.

I am reminded of the words of Jesus in Luke's gospel where he said: "The children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light," the point being that people engaged in tasks in this world often give more attention and dedication to their pursuits than we do as Christians in following Christ.

When Jesus led Peter, James and John, up the mountain he was transfigured before them so that "his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." A voice then came from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him."

The Transfiguration has been understood in the Church as a manifestation of the glory of Christ and an anticipation of the glory that would be His in the Resurrection. It is the Risen Christ whom we follow. He lives and reigns in the glory of heaven and is the pledge of our own future glory and resurrection into eternal life.

The climb in the kingdom of God to the fullness of eternal life is not an easy one for us. The top of God's mountain is quite high. Look how long it took Jesus to train his apostles. And even after the Resurrection Peter had to be reprimanded by Paul for falling back into some of his old practices out of human respect. But we all have a rope to help us make the climb and that rope is the Church. In the Church we are instructed on how to follow Christ and given the grace through the sacraments to live virtuous lives. In the Church we meet Christ, our Lord and Savior. Alex Honnold (a non-believer in God, by the way) let go of fear to make the climb. Jesus has said to us so many times: "Do not be afraid." Can we over the years of our lives, learn to trust in God? Can we keep our confidence in God no matter what we experience in daily life? May I suggest some of the chalk marks that will help us make the climb to eternal life: daily prayer; the desire to live a good life; Sunday worship with the Church; generosity; and forgiveness.

El Capitan is a magnificent structure of God's creation. The Kingdom of God is the spiritual El Capitan of God's presence in this world. Throughout the Bible, the mountain is the great symbol of God's presence. As followers of Christ we are rock climbers to eternity. We might like to reach heaven without a rope - on our own, so to speak - but we can't do it on our own. We need the rope of the Church because it is in the Church that we encounter our Risen Lord. It is in the Church that we are instructed in the way of Christ and strengthened by Christ in the grace of the sacraments. In the Church Christ leads us up the mountain to the fullness of eternal happiness.

Bishop Stephen Blaire