

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



Left: Church of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor.

This Monday, August 6th, we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord. Pope Paul VI had a great devotion to this feast, and he died on this day in 1978. Today's Gospel begins: "Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves and he was transfigured before them..." but it omits the first words of the verse as they appear in Scripture, which read: "Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John..."

This time frame situates the Transfiguration six days after the Profession of Faith of Peter, which occurred on the day of Yom Kippur, the day when Peter declared that Jesus was the 'Christ, the Son of the Living God.'

In the Jewish liturgical calendar, the Feast of Sukkot, (or Tents/Shelters) falls six days after the Feast of Yom Kippur. Because of this we know that Jesus was transfigured on the Feast of Sukkot. Hence Peter will say "Lord it is good that we are here, if you wish I will make three tents..."

We are Catholics, what does Sukkot have to do with us? Sukkot was a remembrance of the 40 years spent in the wilderness, when the Israelites were led by God through the desert, from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of Canaan, the Promised Land.

Sukkot is still celebrated today, and in Orthodox Jewish communities you can see the sukkah, a walled structure made of branches, built outside the house. Sukkot lasts a week, and throughout the holiday meals are eaten inside the sukkah and some people sleep there as well. Eating and sleeping inside this temporary dwelling makes present the experience of the desert, which was the most awful experience for the Israelites. They had no homes, they were constantly traveling, they had no source of food or water, they were itinerants on the face of the earth.

But in retrospect, looking back on their 40 years in the desert, the Israelites realized that this was actually the most wonderful time in their history as God's people. They were totally dependent on him. God provided for all their needs, he gave them manna, water, and provided shelter. They lacked for nothing because they learned to rely on him alone.

I was fortunate to experience a taste of this during the 2x2 mission last summer. Together with 700 others, including 60 priests, 200 seminarians, plus married couples and single people who aged from 18 to 78 yrs. old. We were sent out two by two as Jesus sent his disciples. Our companions were chosen by lottery, and then a city of destination also by lottery. In my case we were not two, but three, I had two companions: Paul, a young man from Hawaii who is the seminary of Miami, and George, a young man from Laredo Texas who is in the seminary here in Newark. Together with everyone else we were sent out all over the country, our destination was Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

We went for eight days, with nothing, no money, no phone, no bag, no appointments, invited to go and visit priests, to announce to them the Peace of Christ and to share our experience of the Gospel. I went with fear, knowing that we could sleep on the street, or not eat. We were to be dependent on God. I can say that we returned rejoicing, having experienced the Transfiguration.

All of us can say the same thing. When faced with precariousness, uncertainty, when we are not in control, when we fear for the future, Christ gives us memorials of his Resurrection, as experienced in the Transfiguration.

Fr. Sean