

Dear Brothers and Sisters



Church of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor

“Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them...” Today’s Gospel begins in this way, but it omits the first words of the verse as they appear in Scripture. In the Bible it reads “Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John...” Six days after what? 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...”

What does all this matter to us? We are Catholics, what does Sukkot have to do with us? Short answer, a lot! Sukkot was a remembrance of the 40 years spent in the wilderness, when the Israelites were led by God thru the desert, from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of Canaan, the Promised Land. These 40 years will be mirrored by the 40 days Jesus spends in the wilderness to be tempted, which becomes for us the 40 days of Lent.

Sukkot is still celebrated today, and in Orthodox Jewish communities you can still 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 travelling, 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, they 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.

We are travelling thru the desert of these 40 days of Lent, a time in which we are invited to learn to rely on God, to trust in him, and to find in him a refuge in the face of all our needs.

Perhaps we will not build a shelter on the back of our house during Lent, but we are nonetheless invited to live in the spirit of Sukkot. That is, during these 40 days, to remember from where the Lord has taken us, and the destination to which he leads us. We are invited to recognize that our security lies in him alone. If we have shelter, food, water, a home, a family, a life, it is thanks to Him. The Fathers of the Church said that the greatest sin is that of forgetfulness – to forget who God is, and to forget who we are. May Lent help each of us to live in gratitude to God, may it strengthen our resolve to recognize that all we have comes from Him, as manifest in our fasting, our prayer and our almsgiving. In this way we also will experience the Transfiguration.

Fr. Sean