

03/16/14 2 Lent A

-- In late October, while I was walking to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, I met a man from Ireland who was my age. He'd been widowed 5 years before, and was remembering his wife on this journey.

-- He is an architect by trade. He told me he was giving serious consideration to joining a group in Ireland that served the poor in Haiti, similar to Food for the Poor. He'd been gradually turning over his business to his associates, thinking he would be able to use his architectural skills in this very poor country.

-- Richard Barnhall is 13-14 years younger than Abram was when he heard God's call, but he's still toward the end of what most of us would consider a working career. Still, he's open to hearing God's call to do something new and radically different in his life.

-- I met him on a journey where there were many "mountaintops," so to speak (more for him, since he did the entire hilly 500 miles). I'm sure not everyone on the route experienced God's presence, let alone anything resembling the Transfiguration. But I suspect many did feel God's presence on the Way of St. James.

-- Abram was called to put his utter trust in a God he was not very familiar with. All we know about him was that he must have been fairly well-to-

do by that time's standards. And we also know he and his wife were childless. God's promise to make him a great nation must have seemed to be an enormous stretch.

-- But Abram packed up and moved on to a new land hundreds of miles away, in a time when that was much more significant and disruptive than an overseas trip like I took last fall is today.

-- The disciples of Jesus answered his call to pick up and follow him. Most of them had families to care for, but they still followed the teacher. They were attracted to him and his message, but they didn't really understand all that he was destined to do.

-- Three of them got a glimpse of his glory on that hill. They saw him together with two great leaders of their faith, Moses and Elijah. But that vision did not set them for life. They still had a lot to learn, a lot of growing in faith to accomplish with God's help.

-- So-called mountaintop experiences can strengthen a person's faith. A good retreat, a Marriage Encounter or a special moment at a sacramental celebration can help us revive our drooping spirits.

-- But we will still need an abiding trust in God, who may take us in a different direction than we expect. We need the grace God bestowed on us in Christ Jesus every day. We can't stay on the mountaintop forever, but we must trek the valleys and hills of life, bearing our share of hardships, strengthened by God's abundant life.

-- And we have a great aid in doing this. For we experience a true Transfiguration every time we come to Mass. Jesus becomes present in his Body and Blood under the form of simple bread and wine.

-- True, there's usually no bright, white light coming down on the altar. Nevertheless, the Lord is truly present with us, just as he was with those disciples on the mountain. He just doesn't need all the fireworks.

-- May we renew our appreciation of this great gift of the Eucharist, which gives us strength to meet the challenges of life, especially those which call us to move in a new direction.

-- May we also appreciate God's mercy as he calls us to conversion, particularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There he is present in his healing ministry. We remember especially our candidates for full communion as they open themselves to conversion in the Lord.

-- Yes, it's nice to visit the mountaintop once in a while, to have the intense presence of God abiding in us. But we also have to live our everyday lives trusting that God is leading us on the way.

-- The great gift of the Eucharist is God's pledge of his abiding presence with us... May we never take that gift for granted.