

“Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Mt 17:9

St Philip Neri (1515-1595) said that no one can come to Mount Tabor except by way of Mount Calvary. What did he mean? Well, Mount Tabor, as we have just heard in today's Gospel passage, was the place where Our Lord was Transfigured such that His 'face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.' In that moment of Transfiguration something of Our Lord's divine glory shone through His humanity and made the splendour of God visible to the three Apostles for just a few moments. In this remarkable incident, Our Lord was making known to Ss Peter, James, and John, the promise of eternal glory that would be theirs. But there was a catch. Just as Our Lord Himself would suffer miserably at the hands of His persecutors before He Himself would re-enter the glory of His Father in Heaven, so His disciples must follow in His footsteps along the Way of the Cross, all the way to Calvary and to death, before they, also, could enter into divine glory and eternal life.

This is the way of things for all followers of Christ. None of us can get to heaven without treading the path of suffering and death. That is the price we have to pay for our sins.

But here's the thing. Everyone without exception suffers during the course of life. Yet the difference with followers of Christ is that His suffering has given *meaning* to suffering, and His death has opened the gate to eternal life. So the question is not, How can I avoid suffering? Our prayer is not necessarily to ask God to remove our suffering (although that is, indeed, a perfectly valid prayer to make). Rather, our question should be, How can I turn my suffering into something of value? How can I make sure that anything I suffer can be put to good use, and contribute to the cause of my salvation?

To begin with, and before we go in search of extra penances, we do well if we can put up with the sufferings that come to us in our day-to-day existence. We do no small thing if we can turn into penances the trials and tribulations that naturally come our way. But how do we do this?

We can give meaning to our sufferings if we accept them *as if they were gifts* from God, turn them around, and offer them back to Him in the form of a prayer, saying, 'I give this particular trial or pain to you as a penance for my sins.'

Whether we are suffering a minor irritation because we have spilt our cup of tea or stubbed a toe, or are suffering from a common cold or a headache, or from something far greater, such as cancer or a bereavement, turn that wretchedness around, and in the mind's eye give it as a gift to Almighty God and say, 'I give this suffering to you to make up for my sins.' And if we can picture ourselves on the Cross with the suffering Christ Himself, so much the better.

If we can do this often, if we can do this every day, and with every trial that comes our way, we will be doing exactly what Our Lord commanded us to do when He said, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me' (Lk 9:23). Learning to cope in this way with the trials and sufferings that come our way in the natural course of life is of far greater value than going in search of extra penances. It's of limited value us making the Stations of the Cross on our knees every day if we have not first learnt to cope with the fact that someone at home or at work has left his coffee cup unwashed *again!*

Offering up penances is the *only* way to get to heaven. We cannot get to heaven *except* by offering up our sufferings as penances, thereby joining Christ on the Cross. Christ suffered, and died, and rose again. We, too, must suffer and die if we are to rise again. And if, when we come to die, we have not suffered more in this life than we have sinned, then our

suffering will continue in Purgatory until such time as we have done sufficient penance to get us into heaven. There is simply no other way to get there.

One reason why we find this whole idea difficult is precisely because it is completely at odds with the way the world thinks, a world which says suffering must be avoided at all costs. Certainly it is reasonable to take painkillers and to avoid pain when possible: suffering in and of itself is not a good thing. Yet whereas the world seeks to avoid pain altogether, Christ's followers recognize that not all pain is avoidable but seek, instead, to unite it to Christ's sufferings and thereby give it meaning.

We can either exhaust ourselves trying to avoid something which is unavoidable, or we can turn our suffering around and give it a supernatural meaning and an eternal value. To follow Our Lord to Calvary is the surest – indeed, the only – way to share in the glory of His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.