

**May I speak in the name of the living God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

I recently had the opportunity to go up the Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth, which was until the completion of the Shard in London, the tallest man made structure in England, rising 170 metres above Gunwarf Quay - (which is 48 metres taller than the spire of Salisbury Cathedral)

On a clear day you can see 23 miles in each direction – as far as Chichester Cathedral in the East, the downs behind Southampton in the West, and of course much of the north coast of the Isle of Wight.

These and many other significant landmarks are all listed on panels at the base of the windows on the lower viewing platform to help you get your bearings. If you do have the opportunity to go, it is well worth visiting.

And don't worry, you don't have to climb the 512 stairs - the high speed lift travels at a speed of 4 metres per second, reaching the top in just over 30 seconds!

Standing on one of the three viewing platforms at the top of the tower, is in many ways like the experience of standing at the top of a mountain. Being up high, somehow lifts the spirits and gives a totally different perspective on things.

Most days of the week, Gunwarf Quay is crowded with people – who are busy shopping, going to or from work, rushing to catch a bus, train or ferry. It is often like a sea of people, and there seems to be little choice but to go with the tide –the flow of people in this or that direction.

Suddenly, when you are at the top of the tower, you are lifted out of all of that.

Down on the street, the view ahead is very limited, obscured by people, or by the buildings which close in all around.

At the top of the tower, things look very different.

Big things look small - whether it is Nelson's flagship, the Victory, or the Cathedral, or some other building – they look hardly bigger than toys.

And of course you can see for miles, seeing how different buildings, roads and parts of the countryside weave together to build a much bigger picture. Each individual thing is seen in perspective, seen in relation to all the others.

It interesting that so many important events in the Bible happened on mountains...

- Moses sees a burning bush and receives the law...
- Abraham is called to offer his son on Mt. Moriah

- The Temple is built on Mt. Zion...
- The sermon on the mount is preached - on the slopes of a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee...
- Jesus gives his life on the cross that stand on the hill outside Jerusalem...

For the disciples in our Gospel reading today, the Transfiguration provided a very special mountain top experience. For a brief moment they were lifted up out of the ordinary and every day situations of their lives. They were lifted up out of the crowds coming and going in town and countryside, who had gathered to see and hear the things that Jesus was doing.

Being lifted above all of this, gave them time and space to reflect and an opportunity to see the things that Jesus was saying and doing in a much wider perspective.

The disciples, and we who read the account of what happened on that mountain top, have some landmarks pointed out. The cloud that seemed to close in around the mountain top, symbolises the presence of God – this is of course confirmed by the voice heard affirming that Jesus was God's beloved Son - clearly this mountain top experience is about coming close to God.

We are told that Jesus was seen talking with Moses and Elijah. Moses symbolises the Law, while Elijah represents the prophets. Clearly, the experience on the mountain top was intended to help the disciples to see that in Jesus - in all the things that he was saying and doing – the purposes of God's Law and God's words spoken through the prophets was being fulfilled.

What the disciples had seen and heard at the base of the mountain weren't just amazing and wonderful miracles – they were part of God's plan for salvation.

Also, the mountain top experience gave the disciples a sense of direction. A sense of how the path that they were walking fitted into the overall roll of Jesus as the Messiah, a path that ultimately would take him to Jerusalem and the Cross. On that mountain top, more than at any other time, the disciples were able to see the love of God shining in the face of Jesus. As Matthew tells us - the light of that love just radiated from him.

It was indeed a truly special experience for the disciples, which must have lifted their spirits, and given them strength and courage as they came down the mountain, and walked the rest of the way to the cross with Jesus.

It is no accident that we have the opportunity to reflect on this reading today on this Sunday before the start of Lent.

Lent gives us each an opportunity to climb to the mountain top with Christ; to rise above the ordinary and every day of our lives, and through spending time with Jesus discern something more of the light of his love for us and for the world.

In our busy lives, it is easy to feel crowded in, by pressures of work, different commitments, and by various problems we may have.

Or to feel swamped by the things that we see or hear in the news. It is very easy to feel that we are swimming hopelessly against a tide flowing in a different direction.

Worries, anxieties, fears can all crowd in on us and make it difficult for us to see the way ahead.

Lent offers us the opportunity to build in a little extra time for prayer and for study. We might do this alone, or as part of a group – I do encourage you to sign up for the Lent Groups, which this year are based on the I AM sayings of Jesus. These moments of prayer, reflection and study, like mountain top experiences, can enable us to rise above the day to day issues of our lives and to see things in a new perspective.

Looking at the landmarks of our faith – the testimony to God’s steadfast love we find in the Old Testament and the example and teaching of Jesus in the New Testament - helps us to get our bearings and to see how the present events of our lives fit into the overall journey of our lives.

Like the disciples, we too, may come to see God’s love, which shone so brightly in the face of Christ on the mount of transfiguration, shining through in our lives and the life of the world, in a way that will give us the faith and courage to walk with renewed commitment the way of the Cross.

As we embark on our Lenten journey together, I would like to end with a prayer. Let us pray.

When the pressures of the world crowd in upon us,  
lift our spirits by a knowledge of your presence with  
us.

When feelings of fear, or guilt weigh us down,  
lift us out of despair by a knowledge of your love  
and forgiveness.

When the way ahead seems unclear because of the  
confusing number of choices and decisions,  
lift our eyes to see your guiding hand.

Whenever we stumble or fall, lift us up so that we  
may walk again with you.

Whenever we need to renew our faith and trust,  
help us to remember your face, a face which shines  
so brightly with your love that not even the cross  
could make it fade.

And so, Lord, may we know the power of your love  
to transform our lives each and every day. Amen.