

2nd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Genesis 12:1-4 / Matthew 17:1-9)
01.03.2026
Climb the mountain

In the Bible, to climb a mountain is not a trivial event. We often find this act connected to a spiritual experience. Jesus was “taken to a very high mountain” before being tempted by the devil (Mt 4:8); later, “he went up on the mountain by himself to pray” (Mt 14:23), and it was from a mountain that he called to him the Twelve (cf. Mk 3:13).

Today, our Lenten pilgrimage leads us to climb a mountain. Are we really going to do this? Or are we satisfied with a quiet stroll that we have planned for Lent? To stop eating sweets can be a real struggle for some, but more than that is asked of us. Today we are reminded that everything we do during these 40 days should lead us to a real spiritual experience. Lent is not a masochistic programme to attain self-mastery, bring about self-improvement, or appease a deity who is happy only when we are unhappy.

All that we undertake during Lent should be “with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” (1 Th 1:6). It should help us to let go of all that prevents us from climbing the mountain, everything that holds us back or slows the pace of our walk.

Sometimes the climb may be tough and tiring. What is required of us is perseverance in trust and hope, relying on love as a compass and a driving force.

When St Paul exhorts us to be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17), he does not mean that we must be stuck or trapped in a selfish and selective love, but rather that love should spur us on to walk securely and with courage. Yes, we will all need to find times to rest, but we must not, like Peter, suppose that we can settle in tents. No, we must move on, making our way forward. The Lord himself tells us, “Stand up, do not be afraid.”

The Greek word translated as “stand up” is the one used for Jesus’ Resurrection; it implies awakening and action. It may best be illustrated when Jesus said to the paralytic man, “Stand up, take your mat and walk” (Jn 5:8).

It must be clear that we are not meant to create mountains for ourselves. We do not have to look for difficult paths to walk. Each one of us has a mountain to climb, and it is his or her own life. This is a mountain that will lead us to the ultimate face-to-face encounter with the Lord. In the meantime, before we reach the mountaintop, there will be many opportunities for us to see the Lord and to experience his presence and support. On this side of life, most of the time, we see the Lord dimly and in faith alone (cf. 1 Co 13:12). Yet each time he reveals himself and whispers in our hearts and minds, “Do not be afraid!”

For Jesus, the mount of the Transfiguration was the occasion to reveal to his disciples his identity as God and to hear the Father confirming him in his identity as Son. During Lent, it may be that the mountain we have to climb aims at reconnecting us with our true identity, with one or many aspects of our identity and story that we have buried, neglected, or hidden from ourselves, from others, and from God.

These may be our bad habits, addictions, and distractions, our clinging to people, our hoarding and greed; they are symptoms of our difficulty in being at home in our own skin. Not all the things that prevent us from dwelling at peace with ourselves may be visible to others — or so we would like to think — but there is no doubt that they impact upon all our relationships.

Lent is a God-given time for us to climb our mountain in order to own our lives in truth and to allow the Lord to enter in, so that he can accomplish his healing work within us. The

journey of the unfolding and revelation of our personal identity is rarely straightforward; more often than not, it is like the hard work of climbing a mountain. Professional climbers tell us that the safest way to ascend a mountain is to go around it or to follow a trail that rises in a zigzag or a series of hairpin turns, rather than going straight up a steep slope. This certainly makes the journey longer; yet we are not engaged in a race against time, but in the persevering and communal work of conversion, which will allow us truly to become an Easter people.

Here it is important for us to remember that we are not alone. As we climb the mountain, we are accompanied by the Lord, by companions, and also “by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1). The danger for us is to turn the holy season of Lent into a self-centred, individualistic competition. Pope Leo reminds us that “as human beings we are not able to reach true fulfillment or salvation on our own (...). We need the help of those who love and care for us, especially the Lord Jesus” (Sum. Gen. Aud., 03.09.2025).

During this Lenten season, it may be that we could focus our attention less on what we can do for ourselves and more on what we can do for others in order to help them climb the mountain. It would be good if we could support and encourage one another by being more generous with our time and attention, less impatient and judgmental. We do not really know what our brothers and sisters have to carry or what they struggle with. Like St Paul, we have to acknowledge that we know only in part (cf. 1 Co 13:9, 12), and so we must be humble and patient in dealing with a brother who falls or a sister who needs help along the way.

Today Christ is climbing all our mountains; he is close to each one of us. He is also climbing the mountains of those who are marginalised — the migrants afraid of being deported, the men, women, and children who suffer in Ukraine, Venezuela, Gaza, and Iran. With many of his brothers and sisters throughout the world, he challenges the mountains of violence, greed, pride, and selfishness. With you and me, the Lord is ready to climb the mountain that will lead us to be slowly and surely transfigured, more like him and more faithful witnesses to God’s unconditional and generous love.