

## Going Back Down the Mountain & The Daily Grind

Looking at me, you don't say "hey, there's a mountain climber." And indeed, while I love mountains, I don't really climb them. But I have certainly done quite a bit of hiking.

About 10 years ago, I had just gotten my first "real" digital camera. And so I did what introverts love to do - I got in the car - alone - and headed west to the Black Hills and Badlands and Custer State Park and of course Mount Rushmore. (It might have been nice to climb like Cary Grant in "North by Northwest" but that's not really an option; a ranger actually said a woman was disappointed when told there is not in fact a secret "Vandamm House" on Mount Rushmore.) However one mountain I did climb was Harney Peak at Custer Park. It's the highest summit in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. You take a series of trails that gently ascend and it's really not all that difficult to climb.

When I got to the top, it was wonderful. A distant steam train that goes through the Black Hills made a great sound. The clouds were parting a bit so they lit up the landscape below. It was wonderful. I took it all in, and then went down the mountain and back to my car, and headed out to Devil's Tower the next day along with Bear Butte and also had great photography at both spots.

I headed back and was quite happy at the parish I was at (Saint Hubert's) but admittedly also longed to spend more time on the road taking pictures. It was late summer and there was the first chill in the air in the morning, and I also knew colder days were ahead. But I also knew that my vocation isn't to go around the world taking pictures for a living. It's a hobby, one that I love. Rather, my vocation is priesthood. And while I'll continue to take vacations and hopefully lots more pictures, the archdiocese is not going to say to me "Fr. Paul, we love your photos, here's an all expense paid trip to Florida for the duration of winter so you can focus on your birds, no pun intended." To put it simply, I've got a job to do.

That's true for us all. And Lent gives us a great time to think about our mission.

Each year early in Lent, we hear the story of the Transfiguration. Peter, James and John get a glimpse of Jesus in His glory; perhaps looking like how we will see Him in heaven. Peter has the famous line about wanting to stay on the mountain; but Jesus returns to his human appearance and they indeed go down the mountain, Jesus promptly healing a sick child.

All of us have "mountain top" experiences; some are vacations, but others are the activities of leisure we do. And what's important for us to remember is that balance is a must. The virtue of temperance helps us control the things that give us enjoyment and moderates them. So how do we grow as Christians in getting the balance?

For one, we must climb the mountain. Remember Peter, James and John journey with Jesus and have a powerful spiritual experience. I'd contend that Harney Peak for me

was indeed spiritual too; part of the reason I like vacationing in state and national parks or going off solo on my day off to look for birds is I really feel a spiritual connection there. During Lent but also throughout our lives, we need to find what works for us spiritually. Make prayer a regular habit if it hasn't been; and look for signs of God in the world around you. Sometimes in this busy world silence can also work wonders.

But we also must challenge ourselves too to go down the mountain. We encounter God in prayer, but also re-charge through our hobbies and leisure time. Lent gives us a time to ask how that balance is going. Sometimes as kids we need mom to remind us our vocation isn't playing video games or watching TV, but we have to do homework, help around the house, etc. Adults do the same thing. Sometimes a person's hobbies can be taking too much time; other times they can become destructive. Use Lent to get introspective and ask yourself if you are giving enough time to your spouse, your family, your parish, volunteer work, etc.

Remember, we've got a job to do, and God calls us to go back down the mountain. There are no awards of merit for getting up to tend to a sick child, for helping with the homework, for cleaning the house, for running errands, or sitting on a parish committee. But when we do these actions of service and love, while at the same time praying daily and working in time for our own mental health, ultimately we can find we are far better prepared to climb the mountain that really matters - the one that leads us to the Kingdom of Heaven.

God bless,

Fr. Paul