Enjoy the Scenery, But Focus on the Mission

I have to admit, I love mountains.

This upcoming August, I'm planning to head back to the Canadian Rockies and visit Banff and Jasper National Parks and the surrounding area. I was there in 2019, and can't wait to get back. The whole area is pretty breathtaking, and it's a real faith-building experience too. Watching the sky change from deep blue to shades of pink and red, especially if you're lucky enough to have clouds that do the same, and the sun cause the alpine glow on the mountain to begin, and taking it all in, it's incredible. There's also the reflections of the mountains in the water, and the incredible scenery everywhere with the aqua colored lakes, and breathtaking views.

As much as I love going to the mountains though, I'm also quite aware that I can't stay there forever. Because as beautiful as they are, and while part of me wouldn't mind being a full time nature and landscape photographer, I know I'm called to a different mission.

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. During Lent but also throughout our lives, we need to find what works for us spiritually. Certainly when I'm in the mountains, or watching the stars on Lake Superior, or an owl or bird I'm photographing, that's a faith building experience too for me; but so too is the quiet time I have for prayer each day, and of course when I'm offering Mass. Make prayer a regular habit if it hasn't been for you in your daily life; 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. Life is hard and we all need escapes, but never forget what a big impact you have when you do the daily grind of life. Helping your kids with homework, taking them to the games, giving of your time to volunteer, working hard to support your family. All of these things make such a big difference for others. I was reminded of this just last week when we had our first real fish fry in 3 years as Covid begins to finally wane. The Knights of Columbus and a small army of volunteers worked so hard and people turned out in droves for some delicious fish and made from scratch macaroni and cheese and cookies but this labor of love brought parishioners together at table again giving folks a chance to bond and reconnect. Doing simple actions with great love makes such a huge difference.

Along the journey of life, we can certainly stop and enjoy the scenery. As I said, leisure matters, be it a phone app, a video game, a bike ride, a round of golf, or in my case chasing after a bird with a camera. But while a few are called to be a professional at their hobby of choice, most of us are called to something else, and all of us are called to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul and neighbor as ourself, which we often live out as parents and members of a family, and through many labors of love. Remember, we've got a job to do. 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