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Homily at Mass 2nd Sunday of Lent – 8 March 2020

After a fairly mild summer, with so few really hot days that any of us can complain about, we found ourselves last weekend – on the 1st Sunday of Lent – out in the desert, with Jesus, at the beginning of his fast and temptations. Lent has begun, and we are well into it now.

Last Sunday, we began Lent with Jesus out in the desert: hot, dry, sandy, the occasional dust storm, a cave for shelter, a rock for a pillow, no food or water, no company, no family, no friends. The Devil takes advantages of our Our Lord's loneliness, tiredness, physical weakness and offers him – literally – the world, the sort of world that tempts us each day: power, prestige and honour, possessions and control, instant satisfaction without pain, worry or responsibility: an illusory freedom, which in itself only leaves us feeling sad, empty and unsatisfied.

Today we join Jesus, Peter, James and John on the top of perhaps the most unusual mountain in the whole world: on his way to Jerusalem, but still in the Galilee region in northern Israel, Jesus and his three closest disciples climb on Mt Tabor.

In 2000, Mgr Diamond and I, and 2 other priests also climbed Mt Tabor – not on foot you won't be surprised to hear, but in a mini-van! When we think of mountains, the image of a craggy triangle comes to mind. But Mt Tabor is different: it is a perfect half circle. On the top of this mountain the incredible event St Matthew describes today took place – an incredible moment of prayer between Jesus and his Father; dense cloud that enveloped Jesus, Peter, James and John. Brilliant light that transformed Our Lord's clothes as his face shone like the sun. The cloud – a sign of the Holy Spirit. And the voice that spoke – the voice of the Father, announcing the Son, the Beloved, the favoured One. On the mountain none of us are lonely, as we might be in the desert. We have the company of the apostles – on the mountain the Church is gathered today. We have the company of Moses and Elijah, symbols in themselves of all the prophets and the Law of God – they speak to us of the Word of God. And we rejoice in the company of the mystery of the Trinity – the Father who speaks; the Holy Spirit who surrounds us; the Son Jesus Christ is revealed in his glory as the Eternal Son of God.

The 40 days of Lent make their demands on us. Lent is a journey, just like the long journey of Abraham, the first to know the true and living God. God calls him from all that is familiar – his own country and land, his father's house – to journey towards "the land I will show you". This new land is both the land of promise, the land of Israel as well as what St Paul calls the new and heavenly Jerusalem: that's the land that God promises all his faithful people.

But St Paul also encourages us today with the struggles and effort that Lent necessarily involves: "with me we bear the hardships, relying on God's power and his call to be holy". The hardships are to be found not just in keeping our small Lenten promises – no chocolates or ice cream or that second glass of wine. The hardships of life are the ones that litter our path day by day without us asking. The pressures at work. Patience we need with our wife/husband, our children. For our school and university students, the effort you need to bring to your studies, especially the hard stuff.

Some of us might bear the hardship of aches and pains, a long term medical condition, or perhaps waiting on doctor's tests or a worrying diagnosis. For some of us the hardship might be a current crisis, or feeling that you are in the dark, or a bad personal place. For some their hardship might be a personal moral battle.

The second Sunday of Lent can be a bit like Christmas Day: as God the Father points out his Son to us: Jesus is God's favoured one, he is our Lord, our Saviour, our Friend. He is God with us. The brilliant light of the Transfiguration looks to the light, glory and victory of the Risen Christ. But not before the Cross, our Lord's own dark hour.

Do we undertake Lent alone? No: we make the journey of Lent together on God's family gathered here at Mass today. Is Lent just a Christian form of self-help for personal change? No. It's a spiritual season of penance, reflection, prayer and grace – filled effort: with Jesus the Lord. His light shines on our hardships, his grace lifts us up.