

EPIPHANY LAST B

Mark 9:2-9

### The Honeymoon

**“Honeymoon”**: The two words that compose it tell its story.

The first month of marriage is the sweetest – the **“honey”** part.

But then comes the **“moon”** at first full and bright,  
and eventually, it wanes.

So does the initial affection of a married couple.

And we all comment, **“The honeymoon is over.”**

What was Roger Dangerfield’s one-liner?

***“There she was when I first saw her,  
the loveliest girl on the dance floor. Then she got up.”***

It's just like the first months a newly elected president is in office,  
when he and Congress are cordial to each other;  
or a new manager who is all smiles at first  
and then one day the honeymoon is over  
as differences and adjustments arise.

Only the immature, the really spiritually immature –

like some child stars or celebrities

or those who watch too much television –

think that the honeymoon can and should last forever.

So, in vain they work hard to preserve it.

Constantly reshaping themselves with cosmetic surgery

to look like the current idol, popping Viagra and the diet pills,

totally devoted to makeovers, where the right clothes,

being seen with the right people, projecting a cool image,  
they strive to do the impossible: to hold on to the honeymoon,  
the moment, the youth, the frozen image of perfection, bliss,  
and desirability, to always stay on top; to be Joe Millionaire forever.

But, as most common-sense folk know, life isn't lived only on top.

It's lived in the hills of monotony, in the fields of work,  
in the valleys of disappointments, and,  
mostly, on the plains of quiet devotion,  
love, and sacrifice, which in the end bring one full circle  
to a depth of love never envisioned nor even possible on the honeymoon.  
If you've ever met devoted golden jubilarians,  
you know what real love is like.

But the temptation to settle into fantasy land,  
to dream of remaining forever young and desirable,  
to idolize and freeze the 15 minutes of fame, is great;  
and it is highly promoted by an advertising industry  
that endlessly promises to eliminate all odors, pains, wrinkles,  
sadness, aging, yes, and difficult decisions – for a price, of course.

As you just heard in the Gospel, Peter succumbed to this temptation.

Dazzled by the mountaintop transfiguration, he exclaimed,

***“Let's settle in here and build a couple of cottages  
and live happily ever after.”***

But, it was not to be, could not be, and he was hit with  
the most realistic of sentences found in today's gospel:

***“Suddenly when they looked around,  
they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.”*** That was it.

Just like that, it was all gone: celebrities, Moses and Elijah;  
the voice from the cloud, the dazzle, the strobe lights.

Only Jesus was left, and he matter-of-factly spoke of death  
as they came down the mountain, off the honeymoon.

Jesus was speaking about taking up your cross daily to follow him,  
which is to say, make your crucial decisions to be faithful and chaste,  
honest and trustworthy, just, merciful, and forgiving  
in the everyday-ness of life.

The celebrity moments are nice; enjoy them,  
but don't get stuck there for they do not last, nor are they meant to last.

Rather, get busy with unglamorous, mundane graces:  
feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked,  
counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, give alms, visit the sick,  
tell the truth and keep your vows.

And beware of the false prophets who promise you  
endless honeymoons and mountain tops.

Life, grace, and redemption are lived and gained in the plains.

Let me share an example of this.

One of the greatest mountaintop experiences ever recorded

happened on May 19, 1953.

That was the day when Edmund Hillary and his native Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, reached the top of Mount Everest.

They were the first two people ever to be literally on top of the world, somewhat like Peter, James, and John.

After Hillary had climbed Mount Everest, he became what most people think they desire most of all in life: he became an overnight celebrity.

He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

His name became a household word, which to most Scandinavians is even better than being knighted.

He achieved celebrity status as his name appeared as a logo on sleeping bags, tents, and boot laces. You can't do better than that.

Edmund Hillary could have tried to live in his little dwelling of success for the rest of his life.

But he knew better.

He knew that life is not really lived on top.

So what did he do? He went back to little, out of the way Nepal.

Back to the Sherpas, whom he had grown to know and appreciate and respect and love. And he used his fame to bring them help.

In a speech given some years ago, Hillary recounted how an elderly Sherpa from Khumjung Village,

the hometown of most of the Sherpas on his Everest ascent,  
had come to him a few years after that expedition and said,

***“Our children lack education. They are not prepared for the future.***

***What we need more than anything is a school in Khumjung.”***

So, Hillary established the **Himalayan Trust**, and in 1961  
a three-room schoolhouse was built in Khumjung  
with funds raised by Hillary.

In its first decade the fund focused on education and health.

Since then, the trust has built 27 schools, two hospitals,  
and 12 medical clinics, plus numerous bridges and airfields.

They are also involved in the reforestation of valleys and slopes  
in many areas of Nepal.

Hillary spent more than half the year traveling the world,  
raising money for the trust and supervising its various projects.

And he continued to do this for more than 30 years.

Many people today don't know Edmund Hillary.

He's no longer a household word –

he's certainly no match for Jennifer Lopez or Taylor Swift.

His monument is not written on plaques or sewn on clothing labels  
but in the countless hearts of happy children.

After his 15 minutes of fame with the world,

he has ***eternal fame*** with a grateful people and a loving God!

This Last Sunday of Epiphany says

enjoy the transfiguring times of your life,  
 but don't spend all your time trying to cultivate your image on the outside.  
 In spite of the terrible tyranny of advertising  
 that dictates that you simply must have  
 the latest *"in"* thing to be a worthwhile and acceptable person,  
 spend your time this coming Lent on making the inside better.

Be a better, more noble person.

Take some of the energy that goes into burnishing your exterior image  
 and build the interior life.

Dedicate yourself to prayer and the everyday-ness  
 of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Give alms. Visit the sick, forgive enemies.

You really don't need another sweater or the latest CD. Or I-Tune!

Give that money to the poor.

This is a sure and better way to maturity, wholeness, and holiness.

What's the bottom line?

The honeymoon is wonderful, but the moon must wane.

The mountaintop is exhilarating, but the plain is where it's at.

Hobnobbing with celebrities like Moses and Elijah is nifty,  
 but serving your neighbor gets you to heaven.

The transfiguration is a lift, but being alone with Jesus is what counts.

Amen.