

HOMILY – 27 Oct. 2019 – Br. Thomas

A few weeks ago our new missional curate, Mary Barnett, gave us an inspiring sermon on trees, helping some of us to look and think differently about trees.

This morning I will be talking not about trees but a little about mountains, not the peaks many climbers strive to reach for personal achievement. But the mountains of our lives which we strive to climb or remain on almost everyday.

This summer I have been reading a book by David Brooks, a New York Times contributor and Public Television reporter. The book is titled: *The Second Mountain*, subtitled “the Quest for a Moral Life.” First, this sounds a bit heavy handed and would most likely scare most of us. Do we need someone to tell us more about how to lead a better life?

The author is not trying to do this at all – We are first of all reminded that there is a **FIRST MOUNTAIN!** And that mountain is the one we start to climb as we grow and progress with our friends, our families, our education, our jobs, our careers and so forth. On that mountain we seem content with ourselves, and all that we have accomplished with our jobs, our achievements, our friends, our families, and just about everything.

But without warning, situations come and pull us down from that mountain and we land in a valley below in discontent – Maybe it was a sudden death of a loved one, a business failure, an illness, or anything that caused us to despair. Whatever it was, it may have left us feeling alone or unloved. It varies. We don’t seem to be able to climb back to that first mountain.

Yes, many do climb back, but often there is that feeling that things are not the same. There must be something else we should be doing in addition, perhaps, to what we are already doing. And, so, without warning or a bolt of lightning, we start to climb the **SECOND MOUNTAIN!**

Most of us have experienced the Second Mountain without realizing it. Without analyzing too much, we are there and we feel so much better about ourselves and others. Why? Was this the Holy Spirit at work in us? We all are familiar with the saying that God works in mysterious ways, but we still wonder. Needless to say, a change has taken place and we are part of it. A sense of belonging to the human race, a sense of compassion.

As an example, I'd like to tell you a little about my second mountain adventure. When I returned back to Holy Trinity several years after my son Cedrik's death I felt there must be something else I should do beside being an acolyte or reading a lesson every now and then. When I spoke to Mother Maggie, the rector at that time, she suggested that I make an appointment to see Bishop Ahrens, which I did. Bp Ahrens at first thought I had been considering the Diaconate (which was far from my thoughts). She felt God had something else for me. Let's pray about it she said --And right there, in her office, we knelt and prayed.

Well, God did have something else for me to do. By chance I learned about a group of men and women within the Episcopal Church who followed the Rule of St. Benedict. They do not live in monasteries or convents but live in their own homes with their families and serve in their parish churches. With the support of my wife, Ragna, I attended one of their meetings and shortly thereafter was admitted. And now, here I am, a Benedictine. . . on *my* second mountain!

But I am not alone on this mountain. You and many others travelled with me in thought and prayer. I'm sure that some of you too have experienced something similar in life, whether it is a mountain or not. The important thing is to start on the journey, which may have a few detours along the way.

At this point, I'd like to say a few words about others who, without being aware, came to their second mountain:

First, St. Benedict. He was from a wealthy, well-to-do Italian family. While a student in Rome he became disgusted about all that was going on in the city and in the church at the time – that was in the mid-6th century. Leaving the city behind he sought solitude in the countryside and lived as a hermit. Soon his piety inspired others and he later became

the founder of the Order which spread throughout the world. He had come to his Second Mountain!

There are countless others. . . including St Francis, who like Benedict, was raised in a well-to-do environment but renounced it all to serve other less fortunate souls. . . all from his second mountain. Again, here was love and compassion at work.

Getting back to David Brook's book, eventhough it is not considered a spiritual book, it nonetheless is very much so. The thoughts and examples he pursues are laced with concern and care not just for ourselves but others and all living creatures. A perfect example is this from a section entitled "A Declaration of Interdependence."

"A good society is like a dense jungle. There are vines and intertwining branches. There are enmeshed root systems and connections across the canopy. There are monkeys playing at the treetops, the butterflies darting below. Every creature has a place in the great ecosystem. There is a gorgeous diversity and beauty and vitality. . .

"A good person leading a good life is a creature enmeshed in that jungle. A beautiful life is a planted life, attached and dynamic. A good life is a symbiotic life—serving others wholeheartedly and being served wholeheartedly in return. It is daily acts of loving-kindness, gentleness in reproach, forbearance after insult. It is an adventure of mutual care, building, and exploration. . . ."

And now I come down from my Second Mountain to offer myself to you in whatever way God wills, and to leave you with a few words from the author. . . "The body grows according to what it consumes;
the soul grows by the measure of love it pours out."

—Amen.