

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE RISING STAR

(adapted by Mary Wood, Director of Religious Education for Our Mother of Sorrows/ St. Peter the Apostle parish in Centreville, Maryland (mos-religious.ed@verizon.net) from the Story presented by Gilles Cotes on 4catholiceducators.com)

Once upon a time, there was a very sad princess. The people in her kingdom tried to offer suggestions on ways to cheer her up, and she tried everything they suggested. She tried staying up late to watch funny shows on television. She tried watching YouTube videos that she knew her parents would not like. She tried playing video games for hours on end. She tried gossiping with her girlfriends and making fun of other people. She stopped going to church and doing anything that she thought was too boring. She demanded that she always went first, and she always got what she wanted. And she shopped – how she shopped! She went to the mall stores, and the downtown stores, to the candy stores, to the jewelry stores, and to the online stores. No store was out of her reach, and being the princess, she bought whatever she wanted. No matter what she did, however, she was still sad.

The king and queen were worried. They became alarmed when the princess became so sad that she got sick and would not get out of bed. They sought the advice of the wisest counselor in the kingdom who wisely told them that the only cure was to be found at the end of a journey to find the Mountain of the Rising Star. The wise counselor could not give them directions to the Mountain, however, and they couldn't find it on Google Maps.

When the princess heard of the Mountain, however, she insisted that she go in search of it. She only wanted to find happiness. The king insisted that a division of soldiers and fifty servants accompany her with an almost limitless supply of provisions, clothes, and items of entertainment and comfort.

Not knowing which direction to take, the general in charge of protecting the princess asked her which route she wanted to take. Much to the general's dismay, the princess pointed toward the desert, a place of great danger. The general tried to convince the princess that the desert was not a good choice, but she insisted. And since she always got what she wanted, the general had no choice but to do as she said.

Just as the general anticipated, their caravan was met by thieves and thugs. They killed many of the servants, and although the soldiers fought bravely, many of them were killed as well. The thieves took as much of the provisions and comforts as they could carry, and the princess remained with only a few people and very little to sustain them. Gone were her laptop, her cell phone, her Ipod touch. She no longer had fine food, and had to ration what little she had left. She didn't even have her books to keep her mind busy. They took all but the one she wasn't much interested in anyway – the Bible that her mother had insisted she bring with her.

The princess pushed on, however, in search of the Mountain of the Rising Star, and refused to turn back. She put all her hopes and dreams for happiness on finding this Mountain. It was not long before all the food and water was gone. One by one, the remaining servants and soldiers died from starvation, sun exposure, and pure exhaustion. Yet the princess continued her journey. Finally, with no energy, no strength, and not one thing left, the princess collapsed and prepared to take her last breath. Just as she was closing her eyes one last time, she glimpsed on the horizon the mountain with a star rising above it! Renewed with hope, she knew all her sadness would be gone if she could get to that mountain, and she made herself go on.

With every breath feeling like it could be her last, she struggled to the mountain and climbed. When she reached the top, she saw a village down below, and she set out for it. However, she had used up her last store of energy to reach the top of the mountain, and in her severely weakened state, she lost her footing, fell, and became unconscious.

Several days later, the princess awakened in a simple hut. A peasant shepherd had found her among the rocks on the side of the mountain when he had been out searching for a stray sheep. He brought her back to his home and his family began nursing her back to health. They did not know she was a princess, and she did not tell them. She did not want them to like her or care for her because she was a princess. And the longer she was with them, she realized that they truly loved and cared for her and accepted her simply as another human being. As she recovered physically, she could feel a transformation taking place deep within her heart. Slowly, her sadness was replaced with a feeling of peace and joy.

When the princess was fully recovered, she did not want to leave her new life. She was content to work among the peasants. She enjoyed their stories, and sharing meals with them. She discovered that she had many talents of her own that she could contribute to her peasant community, and she felt wonderful sharing her talents and gifts with them. She taught the peasant children to read using her only book, the Bible. She learned to make bread, and found that she could shape the dough into many different shapes and styles that were pleasing to the peasants. She used her beautiful voice to sing songs and keep the air light with music as they worked side by side in the fields. She even discovered that merely listening when someone else was talking was a special gift. She slowly realized that by using her gifts and talents, she brought joy to those around her in the same way that their gifts and talents, their love, brought joy to her.

Intensely grateful for her new life, and with a new understanding of God's great gift of grace, she decided to seek out the King of this new kingdom where she had finally found happiness to offer her thanks. Entering the castle through the peasant gate, she made her way through the maze of streets and found the Great Hall where she knew the King resided. In the manner of peasants, she entered and bowed her head before the King and Queen.

A great hush came over the Great Hall as the King and Queen stood, and the King exclaimed "You have come back to us!" Looking up, the princess saw her mother and father standing before her with open arms. It was then she realized with a newly found joy in her heart that her journey had taken her full circle. She was finally home!

The End.

For Discussion

1. What was making the Princess unhappy? What things were preventing her from finding happiness?
2. How did she find happiness?
3. If she was so unhappy when she left home, why do you think she was happy when she discovered she was home again?
4. How did the Princess let God's grace flow into her heart?
5. What things do I have that are cluttering my heart and making it hard for God's grace to fill my heart?
6. What gifts and talents do I have that help others find happiness in their lives?