

TRANSFIGURATION

I love mountains. As a young man I often walked on the mountains in South Wales. It was a good place to think. The people down in the valley seemed so insignificant and the world around and above seemed so immense that it helped to put life's problems into perspective.

I wonder what was occupying the mind of Jesus as he stood on the mountain top with his few friends. He must have realised that his own crucifixion could not be far off. I've often wondered if Jesus had seen a crucifixion. They were not uncommon. The Romans used them as a deterrent for slaves against rebellion. Jesus would certainly have known about them. How could he sleep at night with such a prospect before him? And how horrible his aloneness in knowing that his friends, not even Peter, possessed the wit to see the course which events were bound to take, given the conflict that had broken out between Jesus and the religious and secular authorities of his day. The followers of Jesus believed that they were on a mission to overthrow the Romans for ever and to place their own man on the throne. The land would welcome him as so many followers of General Pinochet have welcomed their hero back to Chile – but like the general, there were many enemies lying in wait. How could Jesus explain to his friends that his enemies were wanting to crucify him rather than crown him.

I sometimes think that Peter's response – 'It is good to be here – shall we build some dwellings here – one for you - one for Moses and one for Elijah' is rather like watching the in-flight movie on the plane rather than face the ultimate prospects of our mortality.

But whatever happened on that mountain on that day, in was surely a moment in which the perspective of Jesus' life was suddenly brought sharply into focus. According to the Gospel

accounts, there came a voice from heaven, 'This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them, but only Jesus. It was in that moment when they received a clarity of vision which they had not received before – they knew and understood. Not only the disciples, but Jesus himself also saw and accepted the reality. For a brief moment in time the veil had been drawn back and they had beheld his glory – the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The great lay theologian C.S. Lewis said of the mystery of time, 'The past is dead and buried, the future is unknown but the present moment is a sacrament because in the present moment, time touches eternity and we are in the presence of the Divine.'

So what does the Transfiguration of Christ mean for us? We are all coming to terms one way or another with our own mortality. Is there anyone who knows nothing of the apprehension about the future? Who is there by the time of drawing his or her old age pension that gives not a passing thought to what our end will be? Of course we cannot talk about it, which is why we sometimes feel horribly alone. Is it not possible then to hear in this transfiguration story some word of God addressed to us? Not least, that Christ understands our loneliness – he experienced it himself - And can we not, knowing that all will be well in the end, look for reassurance in those words 'This is my Son the beloved, listen to him.'

It is the relationship, to God, which is personalised in the sacrament of the Eucharist; 'The Body of Christ, the Blood of Christ keep you in eternal life.' Perhaps it is too much to expect that the communicant will leave the altar rail with a shining face like those coming down from the mount of God's real presence, but the awareness of God's care for us for time and in eternity does transform our outlook on life.

Is it possible that our lives could be changed by a personal transfiguration? Is it possible that the fleeting experience of the divine presence in our lives, given through a mountain-top experience, could so transform us that we could say with confidence that we had been born again? If the church as we know it is to survive in this new millenium, then something of the sort must happen to thousands of people, in order to renew and revitalise the church. Perhaps this is not possible for us. But transfigured by our faith in the Christ transfigured, crucified and risen for us – Yes, I believe that that is perfectly possible. Thanks be to God.

AMEN.