

DIVINE SPLENDOUR, HUMAN TRANSFORMATION. Transfiguration 2025 All Souls' dtw

'The whole country was lighted by a searing light with an intensity many times that of the midday sun. It had to be witnessed to be realised.' Second WW US General Farrell was writing about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. It is one of the most terrible ironies that it should have been on August 6, the traditional Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ which we now observe on the last Sunday before Lent. Farrell went on to use words that might have appeared so natural to Peter and James and John who were with Jesus on the mountain. 'It made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare to tamper with the forces reserved to the Almighty.' The 3 disciples had the glorious vision of the transfigured Christ, a foretaste of his resurrection glory on what was sacred ground. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then and for many years to follow, became hells on earth, obliterated and poisoned. Since then, notwithstanding no further actual nuclear attacks on countries, the stockpile around our world is horrifying, while wars still scar our world and thousands are killed and left homeless.

Destruction and Transfiguration: on the one hand, the human wilfulness to distort and disfigure God's image in the world and on the other, the possibility of the glory and fulfilment of humanity in Jesus Christ. "There is nothing on earth", said Pascal, "that does not show either the wretchedness of humanity or the mercy of God; either the weakness of humanity without God, or the strength of humanity with God"

Indeed, we are 'puny'. Natural disasters like floods, fires and earthquakes reveal just how fragile we are. So do the struggles and cries for freedom where corrupt leaders dare to plunder and disenfranchise their neighbours, where terror reigns and humanity is distorted and disfigured. We are not God, yet all too often I believe that we can act as if we are the chief executives of the universe. Baron Friedrich von Hugel, a classic master of prayer, once said, "I want you to hold very clearly the otherness of God and the littleness of humanity. If you don't get that you can't have adoration, and you cannot have religion without adoration." Adoration gives God proper *worth*. That is the meaning of the word 'worship': worth-ship – or giving God glorious worth. We do not come to God as equal to equal. We are creatures before a Creator. The marvel is that God takes us creatures into divine-human intimacy and gives *us* proper worth! Our lives are magnified by God. The psalmist writes, 'What are we, that you should be mindful of us: what are we that you should care for us? Yet you have made us little less than gods: and have crowned us with glory and honour.' (Ps 8. 5-6) In the presence and grace of Divine Love we are placed on higher, sacred ground. (Abandon the saying, "I'm only human"; be wonderfully human! – extravagantly, generously human! – sadly, not evident 2 days ago in the White House)

The disciples are awakened by the sight and the voice and the scent of divinity on the Transfiguration Mount. That lingering scent would come back to disturb and revive them again and again. At this point they still have much to learn, for the Christ they follow will have to suffer. This Christ will also bear fragility, vulnerability, torture, disfigurement, and death before he accomplishes his glory. But this is the paradox of Grace and the mystery of Faith. Bound up in this is the paradox of our own humanity and its glorious vocation. We each have an immeasurable capacity for sheer loveliness, grace and blessing upon others, bearing both pain and joy. The

Transfigured Christ, the Beloved Son, confirmed and attested to by the Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elijah on the holy mount, is the symbol and foretaste of all that *we might be*. On the other hand, tyrants, like Vladimir Putin's way of oppression, domination, war and violence, display the worst disfiguration of our humanity. But this never has the final word. The Westminster Confession states that humanity's chief end is to worship God and enjoy God for ever. Furthermore, we are called to love all who are made in God's image as we love ourselves. Before us are the way of light and the way of darkness. Let light and love be our calling. May we; may the whole world, be transformed in Christ.

But don't miss the other huge ingredient up there in the heady experience of the mountain top, which you can take with you to the plain of your daily activity: *Listen to Jesus*. That's what the voice said on the mountain. "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him". Take Jesus by the hand with you into your day and listen. When you take that coffee break, grab some silence and just stop and listen. Get in tune with the infinite. The experience could be transforming, levelling, healing, restoring.

And here we are again today on our holy mount, once more gathered to listen to God's Word and to be nourished at God's table. How sacred and hallowed is this ground; how awesome is this place? This is none other than the House of God and this is the Gate of Heaven. Let us capture the glorious splendour and be recharged once more for the week ahead, sent out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God's praise and glory.

THE BRIGHT FIELD

*I have seen the sun break through
to illumine a small field
for a while and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

RS Thomas