

7.8.22 C St Stephen's (9.30) & 11. Lk 9: 28-36

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

“And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed...”. V29

I do wonder what secular people today make of the account of the Transfiguration of Christ, and especially the young? Many are quite happy to read or watch stories about myths and legends in Harry Potter or Star Wars, even seeking to bring them to life; but when they read or hear of them in the Bible, they dismiss them as fantasy. They're wrong, of course, as a willingness to go beyond the bare telling of the story would quickly show.

Many of us have experienced in our lives a sort of transfiguration, even if it doesn't compare with that in the gospel. In his book “The Go-between God” by our former bishop, John Taylor, he tells us of an experience he had one day whilst walking down a familiar street. There was a large tree there which he'd passed on numerous occasions, but on this day. It suddenly stood out for him as a tree of exceptional beauty – it was transfigured before him.

And many of the clergy will tell you of brides, who on their wedding day are transformed. In the study to discuss the details of the wedding with the couple, they will probably be a very ordinary young man and woman. She looks pleasant, but never likely to win a beauty contest. Yet, on the day of the wedding as she comes into church to stand beside her fiancé, she looks radiant and beautiful, transformed by her delight in the man standing beside her and the fulfilment of their immediate hopes. And it is not only brides who are transformed – artists and musicians who get caught up in their work; monks and nuns who reflect their daily walk with God. And you and I can also be transformed by long hoped for good news.

The trouble is that we miss so much because we're not expecting anything out of the ordinary to happen; and when it does, we often don't recognise it for what it is. It shouldn't be a surprise to us that love transforms, giving us a glimpse of God's love. So, the picture of the radiant bride should remind us that beauty often lies just below the surface of all of us, just waiting to be revealed, even though the first bloom of youth has long since faded.

I remember Archbishop Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury saying: “Whatever you worship puts its mark upon you. You cannot help giving away, often unconsciously, to others the name of the god you worship. This is because the dominant influence in your life, whatever it is, is going to leave its mark upon you. This is true, not only of our behaviour, but also of our faces. We have all registered the serene beauty of those who have devoted themselves to the worship of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – perhaps the face of some nun or holy man comes to mind. We have also noticed the strained and avid faces of those who worship money and power, whatever formal religion allegiance they may profess. The truth is that by the age of 40 we are all, in large measure, responsible for our faces.”

As we go through life we reveal what we are - and Christians are called to be channels of God's love and grace, demonstrating this by the way we live. History has examples of

people whose faces reflected the glory of God. It was said of Fénelon, a French archbishop in the last half of the 17th century, “that his manners were full of grace, his voice full of love, and his face full of glory.” And Archibald Orr-Ewing, a Glasgow businessman, went to China as a missionary, and his features became so radiant that the local people called him “Mr Glory-face.”

On the occasion of the transfiguration of Jesus, he took with him Peter and James and John, both to support him, but also to strengthen their faith, as clearly these were the three leading members of the disciples. And it was also to reassure Jesus from God that he was on the right path, as attested by the presence of Moses and Elijah, and as he prepared to go to Jerusalem on the last, fateful, visit in fulfilment of God’s will and to the destruction of evil’s triumph.

Our lives should also show something of God’s glory. That is why we meet together week by week to meet with the risen Christ in the eucharist and to be fed with heavenly food. Something of that meeting should be evident in our lives to all whom we meet – but our age is such that, sadly, many people wouldn’t recognise this, or realise that it is a reflection of God in us.

A man on a business visit to Paris, bought his wife a present. It was a small phosphorescent box made of mother of pearl which glowed magically in the dark. After supper he gave his wife the box, put the lights out, but it remained dark. He was deeply disappointed. His wife looked in the box and saw the instructions. They said that the box should be left out in the daytime for it to shine in the dark. Sure enough, it did so, and was magical to behold. It is only as we spend time in Christ’s light that we, too, will shine for God’s glory.

Look on his face: so shall his light divine
 On thee in radiancy and beauty shine:
 Walk in his steps; the path that Jesus trod
 Shall lead thee safely on to heaven and God.
 List’ to his voice, and thou shalt ever hear
 His words of comfort, peace, thy heart to cheer.
 Put thou thy hand in his, and thou shalt see
 How strong, how firm his hold on thee shall be.

