



Reflections for Sunday 14 February 2021, the Sunday next before Lent

See 2 Kings 2:1-12 and Mark 9:2-9

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Open our eyes and our hearts to see you all around us, and in one another, and in the Cross of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

Have you come across a little book called "Mr God, this is Anna"? Anna is six and her story is told by Fynn who finds himself drawn into a friendship with her. Anna is no ordinary six year old, she has a spiritual insight and wisdom that you might associate more with a ninety year old nun. It's a beautiful story and much to be

recommended. One memorable moment concerns Anna's discovery about angels. Anna said that the difference between angels and humans was that most of a human is on the outside whereas most of an angel is on the inside. There's a phrase to ponder.

The story of the Transfiguration is all about that relationship between the inside and the outside. It's a principle we're used to isn't it? It's the way sacraments work. We see the outward form of bread and wine, but our spiritual senses enable us to see the reality inside which is the Body and Blood of Christ.

Mark's Gospel is all about this two-level seeing. What do you see when you see Jesus? A man, certainly; an inspiring and influential teacher and a healer. To start with that was what the disciples saw, but here in this moment we can see them beginning to see inside. In this moment, they see inside that teacher and healer nothing less than the glory of God himself. From now on the reader and the disciples know that he is not just a teacher and a healer, but he is Son of God. Their sight and their understanding have been transfigured.

We're about to plunge into Lent, a time of discipline and devotion; a time of simplicity and self-denial; a time of penitence and plainness; and then there will be Passiontide, which adds the ugliness and agony of Jesus' suffering to the list. What shall we find if we look inside the plainness and simplicity of these days? With the Transfiguration in mind we shall see that all those things will deepen our devotion; allow God to purify our souls and bodies; encourage us to hold to the Christian way, and renew us once again in faith and hope.

God knows we need hope in these dark days but there are signs of it all around.

As the spring flowers begin to bloom and we enjoy their beauty, don't stop at that but allow that beauty to lead you to praise its creator. As the vaccination programme takes effect and new life begins to emerge for our community there will be much to give thanks for so above all, give thanks to the one who gives the scientists their gifts and who gives the medics their sense of care and devotion.

Have a look at the icon of the transfiguration on this page. Icons are not just pictures, the key to an icon is not on the surface but what's inside. Contemplate this icon again for a moment and ask God to use this Lent to Transfigure your spiritual sight so that, more and more, you can see what he has to show you on the inside.

HYMN REFLECTION MS

With the focus of today's readings on the Transfiguration, there is one indispensable hymn to mark today. Joseph Armitage Robinson's Curriculum Vitae has enough in it to flatter any two normal people, so perhaps it is unsurprising that he only found time to write this one hymn, which has been a vital part of the repertoire since 1890.

Mt. Tabor, the most likely site of the Transfiguration, is an isolated hill rising about 1490 feet above the surrounding plain. Tourists/pilgrims transfer from their luxury coaches to minibuses or Landrovers to climb the steep and tortuous lane to the summit. When we got up there in 2008 our guide said he didn't think Jesus was transfigured at-all; it was the faces of those who briefly glimpsed Him for what He is that were changed. See Becky's prayer. That was one memorable feature of our visit to Mt. Tabor. The pictures of Moses and Elijah on the chapel ceiling are stunning. But the other most striking impression was coming back down off the mountain, and recalling the last verse of the hymn. Many of us live routine lives, and just occasionally have a special spiritual experience which takes us out of ourselves. Getting back in the coach and heading for Tel Aviv Airport, we were certainly going from a special experience back to reality on the plain. The last verse became a heartfelt prayer.

Carlisle is a perfectly serviceable tune, surprisingly difficult to play properly because of the high bass notes, which goes up and down in the right places ("good" "Come with us [down] to the plain"). But it is the words which count.

'Tis good, Lord, to be here,
thy glory fills the night;
thy face and garments, like the sun,
shine with unborrowed light.

'Tis good, Lord, to be here,
thy beauty to behold,
Where Moses and Elijah stand,
thy messengers of old.

Fulfiller of the past,
promise of things to be,
we hail thy body glorified,
and our redemption see.

Before we taste of death,
we see thy kingdom come;
we fain would hold the vision bright,
and make this hill our home.

'Tis good, Lord, to be here,
yet we may not remain;
but since thou bidst us leave the mount,
come with us to the plain.