

Feast of the Transfiguration

Daniel 7.9-10,13-14; 2 Peter 1.16-19; Luke 9.28-36

Today is the feast of the Transfiguration.. To Transfigure according to the Oxford dictionary means to *Transform into something more beautiful or elevated.*

I have spent the past week looking at all manner of beautiful things – many of them elevated – though not necessarily in the way the dictionary means... frescoes from many centuries ago; carved figures; beautiful buildings and landscapes.. I had hoped that I might spot a beautifully crafted image of the Transfiguration – but I did not..

But a couple of evenings ago, I sat for an artist in Montmartre as she attempted to capture an image of me. As I sat pinned by her gaze and saw many different people passing by it made me think about the way in which we see people.. I know some of you are artists, so forgive me, but for most of us, making a portrait of someone is quite difficult. How to capture the person we see.. Yes, perhaps we might get their face shape, their hair and eye colour – but for most of us adequately capturing the person we know – and recognising who they really are – is beyond us. And then there are witness pictures, sketched based on a fleeting memory voiced haltingly, to try to identify the reality of someone who has been involved in an incident

Some of the artists whose work I saw during this past week used symbols to help them describe who particular individuals were. Some of them are famous because they captured much more of the reality of those they painted or sculpted than anyone else at that time.. Transfiguration transforms into something more beautiful or elevated - captures a new reality..

We rarely focus on the Epistles. – but today, for me, it is Peter's letter that acts as a key to our thinking about the Transfiguration. Peter, writing many years later than the event is focusing on what he saw, what he experienced.. We were '*eyewitnesses of his majesty*' he says, these are '*not cleverly devised myths*' You can almost hear his critics saying it's all made up..But Peter is clear '*we (he, John and James) were eyewitnesses* '

Richard Bauckham, formerly professor at St Andrews University wrote an excellent book called '*Jesus and the eyewitnesses*' which argues that the four Gospels are based on the eyewitness testimony of those who personally knew Jesus. Bauckham challenges the assumption that stories about Jesus circulated as "anonymous community traditions," and suggests instead that they were transmitted in the names of the original eyewitnesses.

Here we have Peter being quite explicit about this – and making his point strongly in opposition to those who would prefer to call it all myth.. Eyewitnesses can be inconsistent and inaccurate – but if several say something similar, even courts of law accept them. And what is it that most stays in Peters mind? A sense of awe at the glory and majesty he experienced that day – and the words which he heard.. This is my Son.. My chosen – my beloved.. In his letter he mentions nothing of Elijah or Moses – even though seeing them would be amazing! It is the transformation of his friend – the realisation that here is the one who fulfils the words of Daniel:

(To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.)

- This is the one who is given power over all the earth – the power of love...

And the words of God that he heard thundering through his head.. This is my Son..

In the Gospel, we get a bit more context.. The 3 disciples had climbed up the mountain with Jesus to pray.. The place where tradition suggests this event happened is a very steep mountain, which even travelling by car as most people do today is a challenging climb up hairpin bends.. In Luke's gospel we hear that Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; they would certainly be very tired... Perhaps some might say they dreamed this.. But just as Peter is passionately concerned to avoid the suggestion that this story is mythical, so Luke (always careful to note important details) notes that it is because they stayed awake, that they saw his glory. This is important.

So what can we draw from today's readings for our lives today?

Sometimes as we see the people around us we can see only the familiar and the commonplace.. But when we are somewhere new, or experiencing something different, perhaps on holiday, or undertaking a new task, then suddenly our minds click into a new gear and we see the beauty – the love and the power that lies behind the ordinary. We catch glimpses of God at work in the day to day. These might be explained by others as fairy stories – but for us they suddenly make sense of something previously unclear...

Sometimes we get fresh insights about God and about our fellow humans through times of rest and reflection.. But sometimes, as in this case, such insights might arise in the middle of a busy day. They are then all the more striking – memorable...

And it is only when we stay awake to glimpses of God that they will be visible to us.. If we allow ourselves to fall asleep either metaphorically or literally – as the disciples of course did later in the garden of Gethsemane – we will miss seeing what God wants us to understand. That Gods power is at work all around us – that it is at work in all the earth – that just as it did when it became suddenly visible within Jesus on that mountain, it lights

people up and transforms them, makes them more than they were before. And that it is the power of generous, abundant overflowing love...

During this week, think about the people you meet.. Think about them as if you were painting a portrait of who they really are – and stay awake for glimpses of God's Love in each of them.