

Dear All

Tomorrow is full of memories for me. It is the Feast of the Transfiguration. In Matthew 17, Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain where he was transfigured—a strange word meaning "changed" (I talked about change in one of these thoughts on April 22nd for those of you who print them all off!). Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. With him appeared Moses and Elijah whom scholars suggest represent the Law and the Prophets, both of whom Jesus replaced and fulfilled. God's voice came from the cloud - "This is my Son, whom I love".

Why memories? In the year 2000, Ruth and I took a school trip to Israel. It was lucky because it was one of those brief interludes between fighting! We visited almost everywhere, and one of the places was the Mount of Transfiguration. We went up it by taxi which was very scary because the taxis went at 100 mph round lots of hair-pin bends. We were pleased to get to the top in one piece and staggered out of the taxis. Apart from a picture of the church at the top, Ruth and I, sadly, have virtually no memory of the church. Israel is full of churches which, in a week's visit, all merge into one (when you've seen one church etc). We just remember the taxi ride! Mind you, I'm not sure we were on the right mountain - scholars inevitably disagree. I'm not sure the students remember the church of the Transfiguration either. When we got back to Heathrow and then home, their response to parents' questions was - "There was a McDonalds in the middle of the desert, and we were upgraded to business class". No mention of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee et al though to be fair when we spoke to them later the trip to all the Holy Places has remained an important memory.

But back to the Transfiguration. Peter said: "It is good to be here" and I hope we say that a lot when we're with family and friends, or just walking in the countryside looking at the beauty of nature. The problem was that Peter wanted to freeze the moment and stop time. And, of course, much as we'd like to sometimes, we can't stop time. "Time like an ever-rolling stream ..." Life goes on inexorably day by day, the important thing is to try to cherish every moment - as De Caussade called it "the sacrament of the present moment". Very difficult to do with our lives as they are.

Perhaps the other important thing about the Transfiguration was that Jesus realized this. He did not stay on the mountain freezing time. He knew that he couldn't. In a way the Transfiguration is like the incarnation. Jesus was up high, but then realized he had to descend the mountain and rejoin humanity where his work of teaching and his destiny was. He did not freeze time, but joined humanity with all its faults, squabbles and the rest. And because he has given us the gift of his Holy Spirit, he is still with us. He has not remained on the mountain alone; he has become one of us. As it says in Philippians, "he humbled himself and became obedient to death-even death on the cross" - the self-emptying of himself.

And the other memory of the week? The birth of my eldest son, Andrew, who is now 48 - fancy having a son of 48! Mind you, he thought he was 49! Time has not frozen for him.

A Prayer from Lourdes on the Transfiguration

At the Transfiguration, Father, you showed Jesus in glory,
A glimpse of what His disciples would see in His risen life.
Bless us in our humanity, with an awareness of Your presence,
Leading us to share in Your divine life even in our daily struggle
Help us to deepen our knowledge of the Law and the Prophets
Channels of Your grace throughout history and signposts for our journey.
Amen

But sadly, I cannot let the juxtaposition of the Transfiguration with the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima get forgotten. The pictures of the devastation haunt me still as do the memories of the few remaining survivors. Please pray for them.

God bless,

Jeff