

An Address for a Eucharist celebrating the Transfiguration of Jesus.

'A Paler but Present Reality'

The transfiguration account in Luke 9:28-36 is one of those universal stories which shows how it is for Jesus, for you, me, everyone. It is a great favourite of mine.

The first thing to be aware of is that Jesus had reached a crisis. A turning point in his life and ministry. He had just heard that John the Baptist - the forerunner - had been killed. Peter had announced that Jesus was the Messiah. From now on it was clear that Jerusalem and his own death lay ahead of him.

Second point. It says Jesus was "at prayer". Whenever the Son of God was "at prayer" in the Gospels you know something very big is about to happen.

His 'departure for Jerusalem' uses the verb 'Exodus'. Jesus and all around him knew he was taking over as the Way to the Promised Land of God's Kingdom. The Law and the Prophets disappear in the Cloud - the shekinah, the Glory of God - leaving only Jesus. The old has passed away. Behold the New Way is announced. It is a way of suffering and service. Hence the suffering servant. When Jesus sees what horrors lay ahead of Him the heavens are opened and the all powerful, always present, presence of Our Heavenly Father was shown to Jesus and to his followers. Whatever the future holds for Jesus, you or me it is held in Divine Love. The Transfiguration is a preview - a precursor - of the Resurrection. A paler, but Present Reality.

A priest friend of mine is writing up his Master's thesis on how to respond to patients' accounts of Near Death Experiences. Near-death is a precursor to dying and actual death. Actual separation of body and soul finally. Like the transfiguration of Jesus, a Near Death Experience will, normally, transform a dark and difficult period which presages dying into an actual, real experience of Eternal glory and imparts great hope, renewed energy and vision. An NDE is a paler, but present reality.

All clergy are ordained to the cure of souls. The soul being the deepest, most authentic part of oneself. The adjective meaning 'to do with the soul' is *psychic*. Clergy are to assist folk in raising their deepest awareness's and concerns away from self and towards God. Hence all religious and spiritual adventure is a Journey back to God.

The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research archive holds accounts of the 1 in 2 British adults who admit to having had one or more psychic experiences. Their stories of religious experiences are, compared to the spiritual, a paler but present reality.

The state of our psyche, our soul is often shown to us at time of need. The transfiguration experience shows us that when we wonder how to respond in difficult situations, we should ask to be shown what needs to be done.

Which reminds me of the vicar who lay poorly in his hospital bed. An elderly lady of the parish comes to visit him. She places the grapes on to the tray over his bed, sits down and says, "Good news, vicar. The PCC have decided to pray for your recovery. The vote was 5 to 4."

We mortals need constant reminding that in times of uncertainty, fear, darkness or pain, we must raise our sights far beyond our present vision, way past the prognostications of a mystic Meg or a fairground fortune-teller, up into the Cloud of Unknowing where God has been known to make himself not only Present but visibly so in the life, work, death and resurrection of his only son Jesus, whose very life we take into ours by means of the bread and wine of this, his Last Supper offering.