

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION
6th August 2017 All Saints Birkenhead

Can you remember when you first fell in love? They say many things happen.

The first one was that I saw stars. I'd read about this happening but hadn't believed it. But there they were. My eyes were closed but they were full of lights.

The second thing was that time stood still. What seemed like 30 seconds was 30 minutes. I didn't want the moment to end. I felt as though it could go on forever.

The third thing was I felt as though I was in harmony with everything – the girl, people, creation, myself. There was a sense of unity I'd never experienced before. Everything in the world was perfect and all was well.

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It didn't last! Reality set in fairly quickly. But what happened in that moment stayed with me. I didn't

know how to describe it at the time. I couldn't talk about it because there didn't seem to be words for what had happened. I did know it was very significant. The frightening thing was, it was a bit like what sometimes happened at worship, and I wondered if it should be. Sometimes in worship I had a similar experience, though not as intense. On some occasions in worship I sensed I was in light – not just physical light, but the light of knowing and understanding. Sometimes there was a sense of timelessness. After communion or during the prayers I would lose track of time and it would seem as though I had been somewhere else. Occasionally I came out of worship feeling that all's well with the world. Somehow everyone and everything was united to God and that was all that mattered. In worship I was somehow connected to something bigger than everything I knew and I need not worry.

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So I asked myself, if that's what I felt in worship was that God? And if I also had similar experiences when I fell in love, was that God too? Was I actually catching a glimpse of God in both these experiences? And if this was an experience of God

what was happening in me, and how could I find more ways of having this experience.

I suspect my life story is partly my struggle to come to terms with these and other questions. “Where is God in my life?” has been a fairly constant theme. It’s a question not always easily answered. I’m not going to tell you my life story, but I hope you will think of your own life and your own struggle with the question of where God is revealed in your life.

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The Feast of the Transfiguration is our celebration today. It’s a curious feast about something that happened to Jesus. Only three of his disciples were with him when his presence was transfigured. Jesus body was, if you like, shot through with the divine so that the glory of the divine became visible. We also have in this story the same elements I have already referred to. There is the presence of light

which seems to shine in a new way. Then the presence of Moses and Elijah, both long dead, suggest they were not bound time and space. Then there is a sense of wholeness about the experience, expressed in the comment “Master, it is wonderful for us to be here.”

These three elements have been noted in other feast days. They keep occurring in the gospels. Here they are intended to give the disciples strength for the coming suffering and death of Jesus. To encourage his disciples Jesus gave them an insight into another dimension of life. Jesus is saying that flesh and blood is not the sum total of life.

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What you see of me, my temptations and struggles, my teaching and healing, is not all there is. Life is shot through with the glory of God, if we will but look for it. The poet Gerard Manly Hopkins expressed it like this: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.”

The Transfiguration is one of those occasions when the grandeur of God flames out. We are encouraged to look for these times in our lives when we can see

the grandeur of God. Falling in love, worship, meditation, literature, music; there are many ways in which we can see and experience God. They are occasions when we become aware of the light of knowledge, we experience a sense of timelessness and freedom from constraints, and a sense of being at one with all things.

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Both the Transfiguration and some of my own experiences tell me that life, and my life in particular, contains something of God's glory. This Feast day invites me and you to be more open to seeing the glory of God in our midst.

It's unfortunate that so much of life, both our personal life and world events, cloud the fact that God is in our midst. What's happening in the Middle East, the very place where our faith was born, makes us wonder if God is in life at all. Today is also the anniversary of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. Somehow this event has become the focus for all the tragic things we do to one another

as human beings. These events, and many others, sometimes mean that the glimpses of God we have are few and far between.

When the Transfiguration was over the disciples and Jesus came down from the mountain top. They were immediately confronted by human misery. A father brought his epileptic son to Jesus for Jesus to cure.

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After curing him Jesus told the disciples of his own suffering and death that would happen in Jerusalem. The reality of life hit them again. The mountain top experience was intended to help the disciples see life in a new way. How quickly it faded into the background. How quickly our own mountain top experiences, our own glimpses of God in our midst, fade when the reality of life confronts us.

Today we are invited to recall those experiences we have that tell us God is present. These experiences are to reassure us that God is revealed in me, in you, and in other people. Focusing on our experience of God is what gives us hope in a troubled world. Not to minimize our troubles, but a hope which allows us to deal with them in new ways because we know we are not alone. Here in the Eucharist week by

week, we seek to renew that experience of God present with us in the life of Christ; an experience we share in bread and wine and in one another. May this Eucharist help you to see God in our midst and live hopeful lives of service.