

The prolific and versatile writer, Alfred Noyes, once said, 'If ever I had any doubts about the truth of Christianity, they could always be dispelled by one memory – the light upon my father's face as he returned from early morning Holy Communion.' If that sounds unusual or strange, I can tell you that my mother sometimes revealed a facial glow when she returned to her seat having just received the sacrament. Once when I was sitting with her in church, I pointed it out to her, and she said, 'actually, I'm feeling like I'm a bit tipsy.' I knew it couldn't be the little sip of Communion wine that caused that. Mum enjoyed wine and it was only very rarely that she became anywhere near what you might call a bit squiffy. I have no doubt that on that day it was the impact of the Eucharist, which she loved, with the receiving of Communion as its climax, that gave her a spiritual 'high.' It was not always with such intensity, but certainly something she experienced from time to time.

The phenomenon of radiant faces is not uncommon in the spiritual life. A change of appearance could be visible or objective, but it could be something that the seers alone are able to see with the eyes of insight or perception rather than simple physical sight.

Is this something akin to the experience of the disciples that we read in the Gospel today? The story begins by telling us that Jesus and his three close disciples went up the mountain to be by themselves for a while. It turned into an intense encounter with God, a mystical or visionary experience.

The story usefully serves to remind us that the Gospels have been written to give us one great vision of God in Christ. As Jesus' ministry began with his baptism, we read that the voice of God proclaimed him as his beloved Son in whom he was well pleased. Here, on the mountain, there is once again a divine affirmation of Jesus' identity and an instruction to the disciples to listen to him. An important message for us too.

Moses and Elijah are introduced as the chief representatives of the Old Testament, the Jewish Law and the prophets, signifying God's involvement with his people in the past and confirming God's continuing activity through Jesus. This moment of light would be an assurance for Jesus, a strengthening for the difficult days to come.

This mountain-top vision or revelation was such a wonderful moment that Peter wanted to capture it, hold on to it in a Moses-style tent of meeting. But the truth is that the supreme meeting of God and humanity present in the whole life of Jesus was itself the wonderful moment which his followers should hold on to and thus be transformed by. Perhaps, most of all, this is what the story is trying to tell us.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage, a walk with the Lord. Sometimes, most times perhaps, our walk is in the seemingly rather barren wilderness of everyday routines and concerns, and sometimes the road is difficult and uncertain. But sometimes we are drawn to the mountain of prayer and to the experience of light, perspective, connection, union, and

deep peace. It may be on an actual mountain, or in a forest, or by the sea, or simply in a room at home. It may come in the normal course of our worship in church, for worship invites an encounter with God. But sometimes we can be just too caught up with our own preoccupations and distractions to be truly receptive to the presence and voice of God. I am reminded of a friend who told me of the Sunday he returned to his seat after receiving Communion, trying to continue with his devotions but having to cope with two ladies sitting behind him discussing the price of cauliflower! OK, part of coming to church is to meet our friends and to share our news, but there is always time for that too.....after the service!

When we are focused, spiritually open and ready, God does grant us moments of light to encourage us in the present and strengthen us for the future. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, with her openness and response to the presence and call of God, we must treasure the moment, ponder it in the heart, store it in the memory. But most of all remember that it has been given to us that we may glow when we come down from our mountain, our spiritual high, so that we may reflect the glory and the presence of God: not necessarily with physically shining faces, but certainly enlightened, and more confident and committed in our walk with Christ our Lord.

And by becoming better people, better Christians, who encourage and bring peace and joy to those we encounter, those we relate to, day by day. Hopefully, they may see in us

something of the light of Christ, the presence of God, and be drawn to it.

Let us now walk hopefully and more contemplatively into the pilgrimage of Lent which begins on Wednesday. Forty days of grace, or forty-six if you include the Sundays. It is a time when most of all we are called to focus on our journey of life and our walk with the Lord, as we follow his journey to the cross and the glory beyond it.