

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

His Countenance Was Changed

This is one of the most exciting stories in the Gospel tradition, and I find it resounds in the dim world where my own dreams live, a realm deeper than active consciousness, which I can only enter in the absence of my strict rational mind - an unimaginative governess who keeps me dull (and keeps me in detention too). Why shouldn't I escape from her reliable but dreary routine, and allow my imagination off its sensible lead? (Have you ever seen Dobbin let loose into a field? Take off his bridle and bit, and let him free. As soon as he feels he is unburdened, he gallops off like a young colt, and throws himself down and rolls in the grass, hooves aloft.) We live in a mindset that chains us up in treadmills. But still our religion sometimes springs the enslaved mind with a bright image of transfigured humanity, as it does in today's Gospel.

I'd Like It Brighter

For some of us, winter is a lethal mix of grey light and miserable temperature. We get cold in our joints and fog in our hearts, and the emotions go into minor key. Things that display life and liberation seem barely visible, the horizon seems filled by what's negative and subhuman. It's a mild depression brought on by low light and dampness. But with the first days of March it can begin to crack round the edges: a little gust of Spring warms the atmosphere, and a trace of perfume comes on the wind. *Somebody's got a hyacinth*, raising its unlikely head and breathing that inimitable scent. The muscat smell of narcissi, the sudden prodigal flush of crocus across some grey grass, an unexpectedly brilliant dawn, and the worst is suddenly at a distance. Promise quietly relieves the old stoic guard of the winter, and the earth is breathing the air of Easter again.

This Beloved Face

Suppose a dream suddenly crossed into your view, on such a day as this: a beloved face, lifted up into a gin-clear mountain air, so suffused with sunlight that your vision begins to melt and water in its fire: suppose your heart should suddenly fill, its beating deeper and louder than ever before, and you almost swoon with the truth of what you are seeing; suppose that everything you had ever believed or understood were to coalesce into one awareness, one Presence, and you became aware of a discourse, a conversation

more profound than the sliding, clumsy words of our struggling days and years, flowing in your hearing, until you wanted the experience never to fade, and the old, ordinary world never to return....perhaps then you would be deeply changed, even converted; and the reliquary dazzle of the vision would remain on your retina as you opened your eyes to the mundane and pale air we agree to live in, and call our world. Would you be able to speak of what you'd seen, have the guts to communicate the unreasoned alighting on you of such a gift of joy? The embarrassment would perhaps silence you, or the impossibility of finding the words, or the right opportunity. *I had a strange dream* would hardly excuse you for suddenly babbling about rhapsody in this world of oil-changes and gas-bills.

A Taciturnity of Fishermen

It couldn't have happened to a stranger crew than this trio of absconded fishermen, who perhaps would have found it hard to explain their sudden sabbatical wandering with such a man as this. We can thoroughly believe that they "kept silence and told no-one anything of what they had seen". It would have far surpassed angler's tall tales. Yet what they will eventually become, Peter and James and John and the others, is no less exalted and unearthly: the apostolic ministry to the world: the delivery of a message which has shaped the lives of untold millions: a pilgrimage through the earth's furthest reach, amongst all languages and tribes: and the powerless power of martyrdom, where one who is arrested, imprisoned, condemned, and killed only speaks more and more cogently of the heart of his life, his faith. The working-out of that mystery all lies ahead of these fishermen as they listen to the talk about an Exodus in Jerusalem, and the rabbi they have followed sharing his mind with figures they have revered as half-divine, the Law and the Prophets incarnate. *They kept silence about what they had seen*: which of them would have dared to lay a definition on it? But they had been led up that strenuous mountain, to catch a glimpse of a love beyond their previous dreams, an eternal truth that you might see, hear, and touch with your hands; Christ, the Sacrament, shining with light not of this world into the most earthly of eyes, is sharing with his own the love which will lead him to Calvary. *Fr Philip*