

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Pure Light

Glass is a wonderful word for a marvellous thing. The hard “g”, the liquid “l”, the open “a”, and the smooth, slippery “s” contribute perfectly to form a word that almost *is* what it means; and the whole experience of saying it evokes the dangerous, delicate reality of something smooth that can become sharp and cutting.

Coloured glass

I love coloured glass when it is made into windows. There is no medium in art so immediately exciting: brilliant in sunlight, spiritual in gloom, and at night a speaking, into the dark, of light within. Yet we sometimes call these windows “*stained*”, and that, I think, is the only use of the word that is not negative. If your tablecloth, your reputation, or your soul are stained, it is a cause for dismay. And what the glazier means is that the purity of light itself has been impeded, divided, excluded to let individual colours preside: scarlet, cerulean, gold.

Our Life Is Partial

This makes possible the kaleidoscope of light which so beguiles us when it is used by a master-glazier. The image is useful for understanding the joy of humanity. In his human creation God has dispersed his light in a feast of multicoloured variety. Viewed from on high, this multiple flowering of all shades produces a magnificent rainbow in which every part is necessary for the whole. A terrible shame that, here below, we lose the plot, and feel that we would rather be in a monochrome world where *our taste* is the measure of what ought to exist; the telly is full of people *creating their interiors* (the Turkish-themed Bathroom, the Railway-Station-Buffer Bedroom, the Black Hole of Calcutta Dining Area, &c) and perhaps this is how people see their role in the world. Lately we have seen a public explosion of words about racism - that ugly blend of fear, violence, and sheer inhuman cruelty which refuses the variety of the world and causes people to lose their dignity and autonomy. Like even the greatest sin, in the end it is simply sad; God gives us so much, so generously; and we can only accept the tiny part that accords with our thinking. What rotten narrow taste! By contrast, the light streams into the world with prodigal generosity, flooding right and wrong, beautiful and hideous, with an equal, almost indifferent gift of sympathy and welcome. You're in the light, you're on.

Jesus and the White Light

The transfigured Jesus is said to be brilliant with light; Mark adds *His clothes were whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them*. Mysteriously, we're told white light contains all colours of light, unrefracted, harmonised, at full power. If we consider our individuality as *refracted* light coming from the Creator, then Jesus is the white light that contains all possible refractions. He is kin to all of us: in him we can all find resolution, reconciliation, unity. *In him was life; that life was the light of men*. This is a quality of the Lord's holiness, since the light with which each of us shines is our likeness to God. In our sympathy for others, especially those different from ourselves, we acquire other shades, we grow more like Christ, in whom the love of the Father burns at full power. As our power to love grows and learns, our share of light grows stronger, and we can speak of Jesus as our Daystar, of Baptism as our dawn, of Easter as our rising: for *whatever is illuminated turns into light*.

Darkened Life

Darkness is the medium of evil; John spoke of those who are *afraid to come out into the light because their deeds are evil*. In Lent our longing for the spring becomes a palpable sign of our longing for goodness and simplicity; the time for Mary Magdalene, “from whom He had driven out seven devils”, who will first meet the risen Christ in the Easter garden. We can share her journey, for Isaiah's God tells us: *Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool*. This is not something we have to work for or create for ourselves. We would not have the power to do it. No: it's a matter of abandoning our efforts to deserve God, or to balance our books, or to tell him: *I have built you a house that is worthy of you*.

We can't deserve him or do him justice. That's what the Transfiguration makes us understand. So let the economy of salvation catch us up into itself, and the grace of God pardon us and remake us.
Fr Philip