

“The shape of things to come” - a phrase we often have to forego, because we are timebound creatures, whose future is always uncertain. We plan and design the way we would like to see the future, and again and again it fails to satisfy our forecast, be it never so wise.

Nevertheless, we are designed to be planners, forestallers of bad fortune, eliminators of chance, preventers of danger; and in this we are aspiring to be like God, for whom time does not exist except as a limiting condition which he has chosen for his creation. Because God’s creating always leaves a way through to himself, and his eternal fulfilment, we can say that God has nothing in store for us which will rob us of his love.

At the same time, we pass through valleys of shadow which not only look terrible, but which actually do damage us and sometimes actually carry us off. All our prayer for God’s protection does not alter the fact that each of us will one day experience annihilation; and the most seasoned faith in the world will not change that fact. What we call “strong faith” is often bravado, or self-confidence, or the conviction that “we bear a charmed life” which will protect us from the sort of disaster that afflicts less favoured souls, less provident people. But it is written in our flesh that one day we shall look with complete powerlessness on our own approaching dissolution; that is a major part of what we call “being human”; and none of us knows how we shall put up with it when the time for it comes.

What the Gospel tells us today is that however intense the pain of being alive may become for us, the terminus is an experience of total fruitfulness, of a kind that will banish all trace of affliction.

*She forgets her suffering in the joy of having given new life. So it is with you!*

Knowing this gives us no epidural against the suffering. But it gives us a double promise: firstly, that one day what seems gratuitous, meaningless pain will be understood as specifically necessary, for the fruit that it will produce; and secondly, that we shall inherit the life that is formed and deepened in that furnace: we shall reap a harvest from our own suffering, which will bear our likeness and reflect to us the goodness and fruitfulness which God has bestowed on us in our making.

*When that day comes, you will ask me no more questions.*