

The founder of the Iona Community established in 1938, George Macleod, wrote of the remote Scottish island where he beautifully restored its original monastery, as "**a thin place - where only tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual**". If any of you have visited Iona, as Abi & I did a few years ago, I'm sure you will surely understand what exactly what he meant.

'Thin places' as he calls them - are where people speak of having a deeper sense of God's nearer presence. Perhaps you know such a place - probably away from the everyday bustle of life: perhaps by a lake, or the sea, or up a hill or mountain; or juts in a lovely garden. Somewhere you may like to return to again and again, and feel, in some special way, you are connecting with God.

On one occasion, one such place, for Jesus and for those with him, Peter, James & John, was the Mount of Transfiguration. Here, for a while, the disciples witness the radiant and glorious transfiguration of Jesus, alongside the two great men of Israel's past - Moses representing The Law, and Elijah the prophets. This quiet spot for a time becomes '**a thin place**' where the glory of heaven visibly permeates the earth. No wonder the disciples were stunned, and Peter makes his clumsy suggestion to build shelters - as if to try and 'bottle' the moment!

The transfiguration was no mere spectacle, it was bursting with significance and purpose.

First we go back 1800 years to another transfiguration, that of Moses on Mount Sinai (our first reading). Which, in its own way, anticipated the descent of God's glory to dwell in the Holy of Holies, in the tabernacle and the Temple. God's presence with his people then, as always, intended for their 'personal transfiguration'. The transfiguration of Jesus on another holy mountain generations later (perhaps Mt Hermon or Mt Tabor, we don't know for sure) both echoes and exceeds the earlier revelations of God's glory on Mt Sinai. Here, at Jesus' transfiguration, the divine light radiates from within the person of Jesus who, as we read in another gospel, both identifies himself as 'the Light of the World', and was revealed as such at his birth.

Like that of Moses, the transfiguration of Jesus anticipates a far wider revelation of God's glory to come. For Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about 'the departure which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem' - the Greek word ἐξοδος is used for his departure, with all its resonances. The glory of Jesus' 'exodus' in Jerusalem (even though a glory temporarily eclipsed from the Cross to the Resurrection, before another 'exodus' at the Ascension) will exceed even that

of Moses as he led the Israelites out of Egypt. The former brought release for from slavery to Pharaoh; whilst Jesus brings release, for everyone: from slavery to sin, and the power of death; a completion of God's deliverance, once for all.

Peter's very human, understandable, spur-of-the-moment suggestion to commemorate the occasion by building shelters so hints of a desire to cling on to the moment of glory, rather than descend the mountain and walk the way of the cross! However wonderful the '**thin places**' as gifts from God, they are not places to tarry indefinitely. Like Elijah under the broom tree in the desert, who'd rested and was fed with cakes by the angel, had to get up and travel on... to Mt Sinai!

Just as Peter was speaking about shelters on the Mt of Transfiguration, so from Heaven there comes a voice, as at the Baptism of Jesus by the River Jordan, '*This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!*'. At this point, with Jesus' true identity declared again, the heavenly visitors Moses & Elijah disappear, and the three disciple find themselves alone with Jesus. Jesus who himself embodies the Law, though Moses had paved the way; from now on the way to know and understand God's will, his law, is to *look to Jesus*, and **listen to him**. In this way the glory that shone upon Jesus will shine upon every believer.

Commenting on our epistle, St Augustine writes that Jesus' death has torn the veil between God and humanity, so we can see the 'glory of the Lord' with 'unveiled faces', and so comprehend - through Jesus - the true meaning of the old covenant.

St Paul tells us that, besides beholding the divine glory, WE are now '*being transformed* (transfigured) *into the same image from one degree of glory to another*' - or as the familiar hymn puts it: '*from glory to glory advancing, we praise thee O Lord*'. Precisely because we ourselves are temples of God's Holy Spirit, God's radiance dwells within us, WE are as it were his 'Holy of Holies'.

The lectionary gives us these passages in what may be called 'Shrovetide': the days before Lent when Christians traditionally confess their sins and embark on Lenten penances. As we enter Lent, as disciples of Christ, let us be mindful we do not seek glory from our own achievements (as in 'what we may give up for Lent), because that glory bestowed on us is sheer gift from God. Our Lenten penances should address those habits we all harbour that prevent us receiving this gift of God's glory to the full.

The disciplines of Lent are not to make us worthy of our salvation, but to make us more receptive to the light and life and glory of God, and more tuned in to those 'thin places' where God reveals the radiance of his love to us in Jesus Christ. I pray we may all have a blessed Lent, and discover some '**thin places**'. Amen.