

A Reflection for Sunday 7th August 2022

“The Lord is here; His Spirit is with us“

“New every morning is the love our wakening and uprising prove,
through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life and power
and thought“.

Yesterday, the 6th of August, was the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. In this extraordinary event, found in the Synoptic Gospels and the 2nd letter of St.Peter, Jesus is Transfigured in the presence of Peter, James and John; the fishermen, and first disciples.

Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his garments were a glistening white. And God's voice was heard saying “This is my beloved Son, Listen to him!“ The disciples were frightened at these happenings and fell to the ground. But Jesus went to them and said: “Get up and do not be afraid“ and this immediately calmed their fears. This important event can be placed alongside that of the Baptism of Christ, his glorious Resurrection and his Ascension.

Another, equally amazing event, occurred on the 6th August 1945, one which still haunts our past and even more so, our future, and the future of our planet. And that is the dropping of the 1st atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima killing over 200'000 people mostly civilians . A second was dropped on Nagasaki 3 days later on the 9th August 1945 killing almost the same number. Yearly, old people in Japan die of the consequences of the radiation to which they were exposed.

The dropping of those two bombs in August 1945 could not be more different to that of the Transfiguration of Christ celebrated on the 6th August as well. One event a Blessing, the other hellish Destruction.

Robert Burns in a great poem sums up the latter well:

“Man’s inhumanity to Man makes countless thousands mourn.”

I celebrate my birthday (as does Brian Morgan his) on the 7th August each year, which is today. When these bombs fell on Japan I was 10 years old (making me 87 today). So I remember the event well.

Everyone experienced shock and horror at this event and wondered what the immediate future would bring for ourselves, our Navy, Soldiers and Airmen still fighting the war in the Far East.

For a moment a lighter mode and a true story from my childhood:

We were learning algebra in our Maths lessons at school when those two atomic bombs fell on Japan, and our clever Maths teacher gave us a tip on how to remember the solution to the algebraic problem of $(a+b)^2$: which is $a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$. The answer the teacher gave was : atom squared, plus bomb squared, plus 2 atomic bombs! Perhaps rather cynical, It still remains fixed in my memory.

At the transfiguration God speaks saying : “This is my son, my Beloved, listen to Him”. On hearing this the disciples fell to the ground in fear. Jesus came and touched them saying “Get up, and do not be afraid” Which immediately calmed their fears.

This phrase “Do not be afraid” appears in two of our Bible readings for today, in Genesis, and in Luke’s Gospel.

“Do not be afraid?” Well it’s easier said than done. isn’t it!

And well, we ARE afraid of so many things in our lives just now: our state of health: Fears of the dark and the unknown, The rapid rise again in new variants of the Covid infections has hit Switzerland too: Are our jobs and way of life secure? Will we get cancer? And of course our future; with the continuing war in Ukraine and the possible use of atomic weapons by Russia's President Putin in the war there. His words have frightened all the peoples in Europe and around the world and puts questions about China's future role, due to its expansionist role in many countries in Africa and Asia.

Well, I did contract Cancer of the bladder in 2007 but thanks to the good offices of Prof. Dr. Martin Täuber I was operated on by a surgeon of world renown: Prof. Urs Studer. The cancerous bladder was removed and from 50cms of my intestine a new bladder was formed and inserted into my body. To this day it still functions perfectly. One of our congregation, Annama, gave me the jab which started the anaesthetic and my last sight was of a brown face and eyes wishing me well. So I am eternally grateful for Martin, Annama and this congregation, for their prayers on my behalf during those difficult months in hospital (and since) something so tangible; and I was graciously comforted and no longer afraid, as Christ had promised.

Local Authorities in Switzerland are now checking on the safety of the obligatory shelters each community must have. We have one in our cellar which we will have to clear if things turn nasty.

When I did my compulsory military service in the British Army in early 1952 I served in a Scottish Regiment. Our Queen (a Princess then) was made Honorary Colonel in Chief of the Regiment in 1947 as a Wedding present by her father on her marriage to Prince Philip. My maternal grandfather was then Head Coachman at Buckingham Palace and took the Princess and her father to the Abbey and returned with the newly weds. He was also responsible for the horses and carriages at

the Coronation in 1953 which video footage for the Queen's Jubilee has again been shown. Proud moments for our family.

My Regiment had two Mottos: "Sans Peur" (Without Fear) and "Ne Obliviscaris" (Do not Forget = Remember).

"Being without fear" as a soldier was wishful thinking then, as the Korean War was being fought by a coalition of troops from 7 different countries led by the USA against the North Korean Army, and later against thousands of Chinese troops. Our Regiment was already serving out there, and for which we were being trained and prepared. Thoughts of being injured or maimed permanently physically or mentally was at the back of all our minds. We were also required to write a Last Will and Testament...just in case. We were 18 years old!

"Without Fear" was not appropriate, but "Do not forget", was more realistic!

When those two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, there were over 1'500 men of our Regiment who had been working since 1941 as slaves on the Burma to Siam Railway. The so-called Railway of Death. Suddenly, after the 2nd bomb fell, the Japanese guards disappeared into the night and the slaves were free at last. So at least a big Blessing for the mere 500 soldiers who survived those years of cruel captivity.

In their camp a group of Christians had got together some months before the end, and organised short weekly services. Healthier men were taking greater care of the sick and helping those who were dying, The spirit of God was working among them. A Communion service using rice wafers and water was introduced. They used the short 'Battlefield Communion' form: "Do this, take this, eat this, drink this, in Remembrance that Christ died for US, and be thankful".

Ernest Gordon, a Captain in the Regiment, became a Minister in the Church of Scotland after returning home from Singapore. And he visited us trainee soldiers for a Chaplain's Hour on occasion. He later became Dean of the Chapel of Princeton University in America.

The message of The Transfiguration of Christ is one of great HOPE for us today as it was for those disciples, Peter, James, and John. For them a frightening experience and they were terrified, but Jesus came to them and said those wonderful words "Do not be afraid" and calmed their troubled minds

For Christ's words "Do not be afraid" are words of great Hope in all our painful and difficult times and he said "I am with you always – I in you and you in Me" .This is a true, and lasting, Hope for all of us. For we are the Body of Christ in this place wherever and whenever we meet. And we must be Thankful. This means giving Thanks to God, for all His mercies to us and all mankind. And being Thankful is the very meaning of that Greek word we use for Communion: i.e Eucharist.

To close: Pynson's prayer from 1514

"God be in my head and in my understanding; God be in mine eyes and in my seeing; God be in my mouth, and in my speaking; God be in my heart, and in my thinking; God be at mine end, and at my departing".

Just recently I heard the following text used after a sermon: It seemed to me to be very apt.

Go now in love, be kind and gentle, Go now in joy, be generous, be truthful. Go now in love, be guided by God's Spirit. Go and meet God in family and stranger and friend. We can say Amen to that.

AMEN.