



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Transfiguration (6th August) 2021

Michael Dobbs's novel, *House of Cards*, opens with the anti-hero, Francis Urquhart reflecting that, "Nothing lasts forever. Even the longest, the most glittering reign must come to an end someday." It is almost a lament for the fallen Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and one wonders whether Dobbs was placing on the lips of his literary creation something of his own shock at the turn of events.

Whether the words are a howl of anguish or just a piece of world-bitten cynicism, as we might infer, given that they were uttered by the fictional epitome of moral bankruptcy, they do not articulate a proposition with which we can agree.

To us have been given a glimpse of what lies beyond the reach of mortal devastation - the reign of One, which will never come to an end and which transcends the vicissitudes of life on earth.

The events of the Transfiguration, which we commemorate today, are an instance of a glimpse of these eternal realities; and the narrative is instructive for us as we seek after Truth and signs from God of His Presence.

In the midst of the wonders unfolding around the three chosen Apostles, Saint Peter splashes around, seeking for an appropriate response to what they are witnessing; and he comes up with the idea of the three tents. However, just as he tries to pin down the vision before him, it fades from his sight.

The glimpses of Truth that God affords to us in this world are just that. They are vouchsafed to strengthen our Faith and guide us through the challenges - perhaps, as we might say, offering us a glance of the end to which our lives are - or should be - directed.

They are not offered as an alternative to the mundane realities of life on earth: a place to hide ourselves away. Like the Apostles, we have to come down from the mountain soon enough. Rather, they provide a purpose to all that is asked of us.

Beyond that, however, it is part of our purpose as Christians to reveal what has been revealed to us. Through the quality of our lives - our choices and actions - we seek to become ever more faithful incarnations of the Truths, which we have glimpsed: shadows, maybe, of the perfect Incarnation of the divine Word as experienced in the Life and Person of Jesus Christ: we are called to become the enduring vision of God's Presence and work in the world.

To put it another way, we too must be channels of the Transfiguration. I do not mean by this that we walk around illuminated by a Ready-brek glow - for those sufficiently wise in years to remember the adverts. Rather, as with the Transfiguration itself, at key moments - when there is a need for self-sacrifice or generosity of spirit - what we say or do shines with the light of God's own character.

When the moment is passed, the glow of our deed may fade as its novelty recedes; but its impact will endure as the eternal goodness of God works its purpose in the world; for although instances of the revelation of goodness might be short-lived, the Truth and goodness it reveals emanating from God never come to an end.