Catching Sight of Him in our Daily Lives

Today’s feast has me thinking about the ancient story of the quest for the Holy Grail. There have been variations of this story in many languages and cultures over the centuries. It’s a saga that has a universal appeal because it speaks to something deep within us. King Arthur and his Knights, in seeking the Grail, look in all the wrong places and make many errors along the way. Their quest expresses, at a deeper level, our own journey and our human desire for union with God.

The Gospel has Jesus disappearing from view: ‘he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven’. His bodily presence is taken away, almost imperceptibly, but his followers experience ‘great joy’, understanding that he is now present with them in other ways. There’s a lovely paradox at work here; it’s only when Jesus is no longer visible to their human sight that the inner eye of his friends can fully open. This fits in with our own experience; it’s the inner eye that allows us to understand who Jesus really is, and how he is present with us. And so it becomes our quest to find the ways by which we can catch sight of him in our daily lives.

While the Grail is the search for God alone, like King Arthur we can sometimes find ourselves on the wrong path. Perhaps we imagine God to be a distant judge outside ourselves. How often, in speaking about God or heaven, do we lift our eyes or head upwards? The Ascension teaches us that God is not on a cloud somewhere, but is the voice within us calling us to Life. To understand what this means is no easy thing, but our quest, if it is to be real, must take us inwards. Our inner eye is opened only through silence and reflection. Remember silence? Many would say it is a lost spiritual art in Western society.

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and one of the great spiritual guides of the 20th century, believed the feast of the Ascension to be a real gem in the Church calendar. Its particular gift lay, for him, in its being the feast of silence and solitude, our two greatest teachers. Perhaps his insights may shed some light on our own quest for God. This is the grace of Ascension Day: to be taken up into the heaven of our own souls, the point of immediate contact with God. To rest on this quiet peak, in the darkness that surrounds God. To live there through all trials and all business with the tranquil God who makes all things tranquil.

Making space for reflection is about our desire to find the God within. Through our prayers, our praise and our hopes we make real our personal search for the Divine. A daily ten to fifteen minutes of silent time can help us quieten our minds, face our worries, and meet the God who is the object of our quest.

Sue Kane

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Antiphons for the Mass

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Men of Galilee, why gaze in wonder at the heavens? This Jesus whom you saw ascending into heaven will return as you saw him go, alleluia.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 46)

Antiphon: God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

RESPONSE: God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

Lector: All peoples, clap your hands, cry to God with shouts of joy! For the Lord, the Most High, we must fear, great king over all the earth. R.

Lector: God goes up with shouts of joy; the Lord goes up with trumpet blast. Sing praise for God, sing praise, sing praise to our king, sing praise. R.

Lector: God is king of all the earth. Sing praise with all your skill. God is king over the nations; God reigns on his holy throne. R.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! Go and teach all people my gospel. I am with you always, until the end of the world. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, alleluia.

Next Week (Pentecost Sunday, Year C): Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 103; Romans 8:8-17; John 14:15-16, 23-26