

We are in a time of trial – have we ever not been ? – caught between heaven and earth. It will be a long time yet before we can fully process what has been happening to us – both individually and collectively – if ever. What we see and hear in these great readings from *The Book of Revelation*, Paul's *Letter to the Corinthians* and *The Gospel of Luke*, are attempts to make sense of specific times of trial in Israelite history, and that of the early Church and to make sense of the general time of trial which all humanity faces all of the time, or so it seems: a feature not only of being human but of being alive – of life itself. And the sense that pervades a Jewish understanding of history is that whatever happens on earth is symbolic of what is happening in heaven, and vice versa, and this sense has carried over into Christian understanding where we readily interpret material events in spiritual terms; this, in turn, readily turns into a sense that good things are a sign of God's blessing and bad things a sign of God's punishment or condemnation. But as one Jewish writer, Harold Kushner (?) famously asked, 'What if bad things happen to good people?' and our present crisis is full of such examples: why is it often the best of people who have been dying from Covid -19 while the worst, perhaps, remain safe in their country mansion – which may, of course, in some people's eyes, include us!

Mary is especially honoured today because she provides us, literally, with a figure who brings the events of heaven and the events of earth together in a way which cannot be surpassed and prefigures, in her own passing over, the coming together of these two realities in us – but not without suffering, not without sharing fully in that mystery which afflicts all creatures, as far as we know. And it's through this sharing fully in our earthly travail that God can inspire in Mary this wonderful prayer which we say each day at Vespers and which gives us hope that, underlying all the apparently negative events of the world, lies a great blessing. Life is not as it, at first, seems. There is a battle going on, but it's a heavenly battle as well as an earthly one. And the heavenly battle has only one outcome. Who, after all, can overturn God? So we celebrate the life of Mary as we celebrate the life of God, for she is a sign that God's good plan of creation will not be thwarted; that, in Christ her son, we can see heavenly realities materially fulfilled and, just as well, material realities fulfilled in heaven.

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