

A quote from Thomas Traherne:

*'We never enjoy ourselves but when we are the joy of others...Thus we see the seeds of Eternity sparkling in our natures'.*

But how to get there – we have to set our faces resolutely towards Jerusalem, towards joy rather than despair, towards others rather than oneself, towards God. We have like Christ to make a choice, and stick to it. It won't be easy and we'll make mistakes – as James and John do when they misperceive the nature of the journey and want to burn down the Samaritan village, still tied as they are to the old way of thinking- Israel succeeds by destroying its oneness, we succeed by getting our way. And it's subtle, for surely Jerusalem doesn't promise joy for Jesus but destruction. Still he goes, and goes by an unusual way; not by the flatlands of the Jordan valley and then up from Jericho but through the hills of Samaria, a more direct but more dangerous route so keen is the call now for him to accomplish his mission, his meaning, and there's no stopping him; he has set his face like flint. If you may allow me one more reference to that film on the Falklands veterans - which has obviously had a marked effect on me – there's a scene where a now old but then very young officer recounts a moment of decision which changed his whole life – and led to the maturity we see in his face now – set like flint. In one of his first encounters with the enemy he has had to kill at close hand and seen others of his own killed too and he begins 'berserking', that is losing all self control in his desire to kill: another officer calms him down and the attack goes on but he then finds himself in a ditch full of freezing water and emerges eventually with all the signs of hyperthermia – he's shaking uncontrollably and is in no fit state to lead his men, he has to make a choice and the choice for him is to find the body of a dead comrade and exchange clothing for otherwise he will not survive the night or worse could find himself sent to the rear as a casualty. He chooses to exchange clothes and to stay with his own men and fight, and so recovers his sense of self worth and ability to lead. It may seem a strange comparison as he has chosen to go on to kill if necessary but it's the starkness of the decision which struck me, and we all have such moments – to go on or to live forever with the regret of not quite making it. Or to rephrase it in monastic terms quoting Peter Lein in his study of monks (The Frontiers of Paradise 1987)

*'If a monk realised that his vocation as a young monk was to become an old monk, I think he would be terrified'*

Perhaps we can best sum this up by saying that it's possible to find joy still even in deep trauma – the joy of being true to oneself by being true to others, which we might otherwise couch in religious terms as being true to God. And make no mistake: we are in a battle for our lives.

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour