

No sun – no moon!
 No morn – no noon –
 No dawn – no dusk – no proper time of day –
 No sky – no earthly view –
 No distance looking blue –
 No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,
 No comfortable feel in any member –
 No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees ,
 No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds.
 November!

(Thomas Hood)

A fitting poem perhaps for this time of anti-cyclonic gloom and the apocalyptic doom which seems to surround us and to match the mood of today's readings – but appearances can be deceptive or easily enlarged to meet another's more contrived perspective. The readings today reflect the cyclical nature of our liturgy – it's a prelude not only to disaster but to resurrection and we immediately move on not to the world's ending but to Christmas and the coming of our saviour both then and now. The hope we have is not for an escape from the perennial troubles of the world but for a larger meaning in it which will carry us through all our tribulations, necessary or not. We have a larger hope, not a manufactured one but a gift given to us by the fact of a saviour, someone we will one day meet, one like us in all things but sin, one like us in temptation and tribulation, one like us who has had every cause to despair, who wept after all for Jerusalem, but had this larger hope kept and carried for us so that we might have it also. So it's more than simply finding ways to be happy, to take the edge perhaps off a depressive temperament, or the fact of death. God knows, we need our smaller joys but they can only take us so far. Kate Moss speaks beautifully of this in a recent interview in The Tablet, she was brought up in a family of deep faith – it gave them all a sense of hope and meaning when her father dies

He was praying and peaceful because he believed he was on the verge of something else. I didn't realise in the moment what a wonderful gift that was for those of us left behind.

Gift again and one we too can pass on, this gift which is not limited to the times we live in, which is not a matter of temperament, which is not even tied to the metaphorical reading of the world around us, those signs of spring which even now beset us and could as well be read as signs of global warming, or as a prelude to rapture and God's just judgement on the world- bring it on as we're going to be all right as God's righteous ones, destined not even to die but be taken up even now into heaven.

What Thomas Hardy is not finding but still hoping for in his meditation on the Darkling Thrush, the Song Thrush that sings even now in November, is that greater hope and joy that only faith can provide- again not faith as manufactured but faith as a given, as a gift which often surprises us with joy: a joy we still have despite the tears we also have for Jerusalem. Now there's a gift for Christmas worth asking for and for giving.

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