

Two quotes from McGilchrist which might be helpful today: firstly,

Reality like the river, is a flow, which only seems to be composed of discrete drops when we try – and fail comprehensively- to catch it in the net of language: the bits that we do catch, the drops from the net, are an artefact of our process of investigation. No net, no drops.

(p.970 *The Matter with Things*)

We can use that more generally to highlight how difficult it is to describe anything, let alone what we might call spiritual, and, more particularly, with regard to Peter's fumbling attempts to respond to the Transfiguration. He just doesn't know what to say or do and tries to capture the moment in a set of tents, ironically perhaps, as significant of movement as much as of staying put – an echo of the time the people of Israel were on the move and had to live in tents. And so to the second quote:

At some deep level, reality requires both elements of motion and (relative) stasis, the wave and the particle, the continuous and discrete.

(p.978 *ibid.*)

But it's not a symmetrical relationship: it reflects the need for the left hemisphere of the brain – always wanting fixed points and certainty, to be ultimately subject to the right hemisphere, always seeking a larger vision, happy to go with the flow, to live with uncertainty.

I wonder if Moses and Elijah can be seen in the same light. Moses the bringer of the Law, which is all about making reality as exact as possible, defining terms and people so that one is guilty or not, and Elijah the visionary, always on the move, sensitive to the gentle wind of the Spirit, taken up to heaven in a chariot and said to come again as a precursor to the Messiah and the Messianic age. Both 'mountain men', as Vera Holyhead describes them, and present to Jesus on a mountain again, to signify that Jesus needs them both as he prepares for *the passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem* – a passing which, again, just like his first prediction of the Passion immediately beforehand, Peter does not want to happen – cannot even imagine. No, let's keep Jesus here on the mountain- top in his glorified state. But the cloud hides them all and when it, in its turn, presumably passes they find themselves alone with Jesus, back to the ordinary; no chariots this time but a long slog down. So why did it happen? What was it for?

This is my Son, the chosen One, listen to him.

Jesus will tell them twice more of the passing he has to make in Jerusalem but the Transfiguration will remind them that this will not be his end; that there is another reality which exists beyond anything we can ever fully know or imagine and that this life, with its need for Law and Prophets, and all its material resistance – all those difficult people and events – are material for transfiguration too. The promise to Abraham of descendants as numerous as the stars, is our promise too; that is of a God who can take us through death itself – that ultimate moment of stasis – and transfigure it into a life that goes on forever. And even here, of course, words fail: they can only capture the representation and never the reality itself. We just have to go with the flow.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour