

During an early morning drive from the ferry terminal at St Malo to Marc and Geraldine's house at Erquy we found ourselves in the middle of a rally of vintage cars and motorbikes mostly immediately post World War II but into the 60s and of French origin. People were lining the roadsides in places and waving at the cars as they drove or, in some cases, stuttered past. And I couldn't resist waving back from our 21st century Toyota – some people saw the joke and waved back and others gave a distinctly Gallic look of disapproval and refused to respond. Our paths eventually parted and I couldn't help reflecting on the nature of nostalgia – was it a good or a bad thing? Were those who waved back able to keep a healthy distance from the past as well as enjoying it while those who gave us the Gallic cold shoulder were taking nostalgia too seriously and in a sense imprisoned by it, looking for a past perfection to replace the insecurity of this present age and indeed all ages. That's overdoing it of course but I wonder if something of this isn't going on for Peter when he wants to fix the experience of the Transfiguration by erecting those tents for Elijah, Moses and Jesus, to somehow keep the perfection of the vision going and avoid that return to the reality below – to keep the past pristine, unsullied by Toyotas and all they say about the West's industrial decline – and so on.

In religious terms this is to interpret the Transfiguration as a moment of glory not pointing to a past but to a future of glory for us all. Moses and Elijah still have important lessons to teach us but only as symbols of the spiritual journey which can only be one of movement towards our future in God which inevitably takes us through death. Their talk is not of a return to the garden of Eden, but of Jesus' 'Passing' in Jerusalem. They got it but the disciples do not – their deafness to the three passion predictions is evidence of this, but one day they will remember this scene of transfiguration, they will indeed look back, but remember it for what it is – a way forward for us all.

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