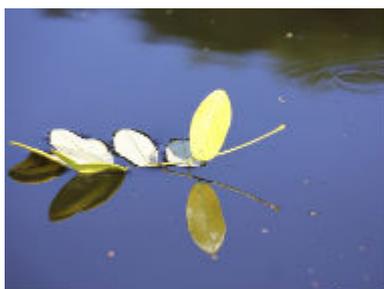


Second Sunday of Lent



Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory. (Lk 9:31)

Today's gospel is the account of the Transfiguration. Jesus takes his three most trusted disciples up the mountain and there is physically transfigured before them. The voice of the Father speaks from the cloud of the divine presence. To mundane consciousness this presence is always simultaneously revealed and hidden.

On a later occasion, the night before his Passion, he took the same disciples with him to pray in the garden of Gethsemane. There they fell fast asleep and he chided them to stay awake at least half an hour with him. Here on the mountain where they saw his inner glory manifested, they are almost, but not quite, overcome by sleep.

A radiance of glory or the prospect of imminent suffering: it seems either can make us sleepy.

Sleep is the great restorer. After a few days deprived of it we go crazy. Sleep rebalances and heals body and mind. But it can also be the great escape. Under the pressure of external events or major interior changes which we know are beyond our control we easily give up trying to keep up with it all and surrender to the oblivion of sleep. Whenever we are confronted with more than we can handle or understand the mind tends to turn away and prefers to shut down. But no one is enlightened while they are asleep.

So 'stay awake and pray' we are told. Every meditator struggles, especially in the early stages of the practice, with drowsiness. We wonder 'am I getting any benefits from this even if I fall asleep?' or 'am I asleep or maybe in higher consciousness?'

We have to travel through the no man's land of sleep which includes all the levels of sleep consciousness. The temptation is to succumb, to drift off into the half-way state of reverie or even into complete oblivion. Fidelity to the mantra helps us through this zone of what our master Cassian called the 'pernicious sleep' and John Main 'holy floating'. Meditation is

always the work of awakening.

It is on the other side of this sleepy zone of evasion and disengagement that we enter the realm of freedom and dispossession. Then the glory surrounds us and the ground of being makes itself known to us. This is our own transfiguration in the one great transfiguration of the Christ.

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