

A Chaplet for Transfiguration

A chaplet is a crowning wreath
made of flowers or thorns
we are the makers.
God help us;
we tell each chaplet bead
day by day
as life is told.

Transfiguration 1

Important though it is,
“transfiguration” is an uncomfortable
mouthful.... just not streetwise;
perhaps that is why we have missed out
on learning from the Orthodox;
and yet we need to feel,
and even more to see
metamorphosis - what it can be.

Defeated for the moment by words,
we turn to the mountains;
let's get up there
and be changed in the process;
in the climb up
we forget ourselves
which is a good start
and from the top
if the clouds clear
we see
until Kingdom come.

Transfiguration 2

Beginning....

Worship is.... a transport of delight

or should be...

not for me the grovelling over sin

I get that thoroughly

out of the way

before I start the real journey

which begins

with thanksgiving

which in itself

changes things.

[In the history of the early church, confession took place outside "worship" as a preparation for it; later it got brought inside, but does not this inclusion contaminate the nature of worship itself ? It directs us back to ourselves, at the very time when we are called to find our direction towards God. - Cranmer take note !]

Transfiguration 3

In praise of John Donne

Well begun is half done

says Plato

then I will try

dear Donne

to fly

in your great strength

towards that busy sun

that you detested much

for amorous interruptions

but in the dark as well

let my soul attend
the true guide
of the blind.

Transfiguration 4

Red Admiral

How can I not admire, red admiral,
and yet, it is not your colourful display
that hovers to inspire
but your folded wings
which bring me hope,
that hidden from our view
beauty – and grace –
linger yet
and at the unexpected moment
will grasp us with disclosure.

Transfiguration 5

Cicada

Hot summer holidays in Greece
spring to mind
with a certain yearning
for the incessant sound of the cicada;

I like to search along the upper stems of grasses
to find there the exo-skeleton of this stropky friend
clinging on by its claws
a gap in its backframe showing
the passage of its escape

Escape into what ?
into a different sort of being
rather shy of being seen
but omnipresent
through its sound;

it cannot claim beauty like the butterfly
and so it hides its face
but signals to me a reminder
that life moves on
from one chapter to another

onward to an invisible postscript
I pray I shall discover
through transforming grace
that winnows flesh and spirit.

Transfiguration 6

Poet

The Word became flesh
now the flesh needs to become word
this is the poetic task
not to throw a different light
on the mundane,'
but to become,
not different to what we are
but more than what we are
so that what we leave behind
of our tangible self
will not be the sum total.

Transfiguration 7

change

What is the means by which we change
or should I say are changed ?

In sorrow I think of harmful prompts
towards selfishness and degradation
in body politic as well as in ourselves;
and yet there is another way

of course it sounds trite to say
love changes things
yet it is true.

True but not without cost.

Transfiguration 8

Magic Flute

A father's love is known in many ways;
My father was a man without the words
to name his love
So he gave me music instead
Or brought to life
The talent in my heart

The treble recorder that he gave
Made beautifully from rosewood
Was for me the magic flute;
It meant there was another realm in life
When schoolyard bullies had their way
There was a word they could not say

The word my father could not say
Either.

Transfiguration 9

substance

Transfiguration, transformation
is there a difference ?
Transformation can affect
the accidents of our life
appearance
style.

Transfiguration is about the substance.

Transfiguration 10

The sun and Donne

The sun does the work
of quickening things
and is far from being
a busy old fool
despite John Donne

though sometimes it blinds me
while I sit here typing away ...

I have a cosmos plant
grown from seed
sunflower relative
daily it turns its day's eye
sunward

until its perfect bloom
provides an insect haven.

Reluctant I find myself
to make the turn sunwards,
grace-wards.
perhaps John Donne will help ?,
I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Transfiguration 11

The Lotus

At the Java Buddhist temple
I walk beside a brook
with the head monk
who asks me if I know
the mystery of the lotus:
there they are, growing
alongside us

I stumble a reply
speaking of beauty and perfection;
“No” he says, “look below,
See how they grow”
“You see down there,
out of the muck and mud
they make their way
upwards to perfect beauty;
that is their message;

not to be deterred
by what we don't like to see
looking back in our lives,
making the inward journey;
never be discouraged;
Remember this; never forget,
my brother."

Transfiguration 12

Garden (I)

I tread the garden after sweet showers
and feel the thankfulness of living things,
the pleasure of feeding
from the hand of earth's Creator
but remind myself that often
drought and tempest
lead to heartfelt questionings.

Drought and tempest and sweet showers
we all know in varying measure
in the seasons of our spirit
and while I celebrate the warmth of sun
that makes the leaf unfold
and nightly dew that sparkles
on the lawn
I easily forget that all of life
is vulnerable and transient
before the face of the Eternal.

Give warmth to my soul,
tender Comforter,

dews of refreshment
to my wounded self
so I may turn and grow
and come to know you
even as I am known.

Transfiguration 13

Garden (ii)

It was there in the garden
that they met
the weeping woman
and the gardener

we know the story well
how Eden and the place of Resurrection
meld together and combine
as these two for a moment
hold together.

Such a moment cannot last
but stays for ever in the heart
working deep joys of recollection
which are the foretaste of
Transfiguration

Transfiguration 14

St. Seraphim of Sarov

We live in jingoistic times
with Russia and China in our sights -
a comfort from our home-grown blights!

But now I turn to Seraphim again,
little Seraphim but greatly used by God
he kneels in prayer beside my keyboard here
and draws me silently towards his forest hermitage.

He calls me now to join him,
as the Spirit's breath encompasses
the forest glade in which he stands;
no-one can stand with Seraphim
and be unchanged.

Time will pass
and Seraphim be almost forgotten
but not quite;
like the dear bones of this sweet saint
even from the museum of atheism
brought home to rest,
in our bleakest moments
we hear his voice
shattering our sepulchre :
"My Joy, Christ is risen ! "

Transfiguration 15

Hell

If I go down to hell
thou art there also
even in the hells of Beirut
and of Syria
at its worst
the seeds of heaven

cannot be destroyed

Fire and hatred

rage above them

Covid encompasses them

but the holy seed endures

awaits the time of rebirth.

Transfiguration 16

hand

I take the young man's hand

begin to say the Fatihah

the Arabic long rooted in my memory;

He joins in, "guide us in the straight path"

and at the end he turns and speaks to me about his mother

back in Algeria; and then

"You can call the doctor now,

Tell him yes,

I will accept hydration."

So in those moments he moves from near death

to life, accompanied by prayer.

I came back to see him two hours later

but he was gone,

back to the prison where

with fellow

asylum seekers

he had been on hunger strike

against the humiliation

of such treatment.

I never saw him again.

Transfiguration 17

Hospital

I well remember how
at night
I set off to the hospital
in answer to a call,

And there I find a patient who has died
the family beside hm lingering still
the staff nurse beckons me aside
“too late” she says
“I’m sorry.”

BUT

I join the family then
and without words
a breath of sweetness fills the room
we look at one another
and the pain of parting
eases for an instant
and we know
something has been understood.

Transfiguration 18

The anatomy of love

Love calls us beyond ourselves
Is the most transcendent thing in life
Makes the impossible possible

Heals.

Stretches us beyond our desiring

Takes us where otherwise

We would never go

Is relentless

Makes us realise

Our lives are a drama of the absurd

That only make sense

Through this gift

of love.

Transfiguration 19

Jerusalem

Who needs the stone of alchemy

that makes the journey to Jerusalem ?

Not yet the shining crystal that awaits

to welcome heavenly pilgrims through its gates

but then and now it is in agony

a suffering place that cannot die

but through the generations

terribly displays

its wounds, known in a thousand ways.

Still in that earthy place we find a hope,

and love disclosed that is divine;

the upper room awaits its guests

to furnish it with bread and wine

which is ourselves : the gifts we bring

to make the company of angels sing..

[ctd....

Transfiguration 20

Ravenna, St. Apollinaris in Classe

At the centre of Ravenna's Cross
the face of Christ addresses us,
agent of our transfiguration;

himself changed into divine likeness ,
but no - his divine likeness suddenly revealed
with blinding clarity -

with the impact of that radiance
disciples lose their footing
their downward fall
rescued by grace.

The "I" at the centre of that cross
speaks to us without words
sees all, knows all
is not deterred
by our incapacity
to stand upright;

the cross itself, redeemed
from being an object
to become
partner in our redemption
through the one it bears

anoints our faces
with uncreated light.

Transfiguration 21

The end of the climb

And so they climbed the steps
those holy ones of Skellig
leaving behind
all hope of comfort

How can I know
the life they lived
or live it now ?

I stretch out my hands
receive the gift
that they received
know in myself
the secret
that they knew.