

May I speak to your praise and glory, O God, and in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

During these summer months it is a joy to have a more or less constant stream of visitors through this church. Some come as tourists, some during this 900th anniversary year for the LEGO Abbey. Some light a candle, some write a prayer. Some listen to worship relayed over the loudspeaker system. But others come in just to sit quietly (especially if it is raining!)

Those who just sit always seem to me to be tapping into the holy, the numinous, the presence of God in this place. They appear to sympathise with the now apocryphal old man who regularly wandered into a church and sat there, just sat there, saying: *Well I just sits and looks at God, and he just sits and looks at me.*

Gazing upon God is something I am not sure we all do enough of. But of course, it can feel a risky business. We cannot bear the light of his glory, and perhaps we fear the challenge of his gaze upon us. Those who have been with Fr Leonard to Bruges may recall the beautiful icon in one of the side chapels of Zvenkirken that shows Jesus looking on those who sit before him with a penetrating gaze. It also allows the onlooker to gaze on Christ.

Moses is one of the very few who get to **gaze on God face to face**, and to talk with God. When he does the impact is so great that his face becomes lit up by the light he is beholding. As he descends from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone, the skin of his face was shining. It could not help but be lit up by the

radiance of the glory he had seen, a little like that of a child's face caught in the glow of Bonfire Night.

But Moses is unaware that his face is shining. He is **reflecting God's glory unwittingly**. When Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation saw it **they were afraid to come near him**. Fear and awe are of course common human reactions, even when we are dealing with lesser glory than God's.

I remember serving as an acolyte at a service in Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford led by Rowan Williams when he was Archbishop of Canterbury. At the reception afterwards I found myself standing near him. I can't understand all that he writes, by a long chalk. But some of his addresses for ordinands I have found deeply moving and very helpful, and I am in some awe of him.

I would not have dared to approach him for a conversation; I was *afraid to come near him*. And yet I have never forgotten what I saw. He stood quietly in the queue for drinks, giving rapt attention to the rather dishevelled young man behind him, who seemed to me to have a lot to say about nothing very much. I believe I could see God's glory shining out of Williams' face, out of his rapt attention. For me in that moment he was reflecting the glory of God, albeit **unwittingly**.

Many who are holy I think produce a different reaction in people, one of **attraction** rather than fear. You will have your own examples, but for me Desmond Tutu is one of these. His face reflects the glory of God in every photo of him I have seen,

whether of that almost beatific smile, or with his brow furrowed in deep listening and concern for the abused and the oppressed.

The message here surely is: **If you look to the light, you cannot but reflect its source.** Or at least, that should be the case, and would be, but for those **veils** of our own making that we from time to time draw across our faces. Those of us who are less holy, and those of us bound together as one Body of Christ, perhaps could adopt a more prosaic approach, thinking specifically and strategically about **how we knowingly** might reflect God's glory anew.

We as Christians **look to the light of Christ**, and therefore should **reflect that light**, not for ourselves but for others. During this time of vacancy we have an opportunity for self-examination before Christ as a parish. **How are we reflecting** the light to which we look, the light of Christ, **the glory of God in our community?**

We perhaps would do well also to **discern any veil** with which we might be blocking that light. Although God's glory is of course strong enough to overcome any veil we might introduce, his light would nevertheless be seen more clearly without any veil.

This is the last week for submitting your thoughts to the PCC on how you feel God is calling this Parish at this time. Please do collect a form on the way out (from the Welcome Desk in the South Aisle) and place your returns in the green box provided - that is if you have not already done so.

We have an **opportunity now** to build on the past, and to consider new ways in which we might *together* reflect the glory of God in this town. Please think big - not about any particular detail that bugs you and you want changed - but about **a vision for this Parish.** Where do you think the Holy Spirit is calling us now? How can we build on the past? How can we better serve our wider community? **How can we be *Love Letters from Christ to the people of this town?*** How can we reflect the glory of God?

To engage in such review can be a bit scary. But as our reading from the 2nd letter to the Corinthians reminded us, we have hope through our Lord Jesus Christ, and thus we may act with boldness - not because we have letters of recommendation written by each other for each other that will be read across our town. But because in Christ we have the capacity to **become ourselves *letters of Christ,*** written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.

To become such letters however, we must constantly look to the light and the glory we seek to reflect, turning to the Lord so that any veil or obstacle to reflection of that light is removed.

And so let us pray:

*Loving Father, we have seen your glory in the face of your Son. As we behold that glory, help us to unveil our faces, that we may be transformed into the image of your Son, for the sake of those he came to serve. Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***