

Transfiguration 2009

Dear Friends,

I survived another Feast of the Transfiguration. How did you all fare?

As one of the central monastic feasts, Transfiguration is always pretty dicey for me. It is the most terrifying of the feasts of Our Lord. Even Holy Week is more comprehensible--we all understand about betrayal, suffering, and even death. But transfiguration? When Jesus allows, just for a few moments, the reality of God to flame forth through his human self? If you look at some Eastern ikons of the Transfiguration, the trees, and even the rocks themselves seem to be on fire. Is it any wonder that those poor apostles are crawling away, covering their heads, reaching out in a "STOP!" gesture, trying to halt the terrible, heart-stopping, mind-numbing powerful beauty? Even though they had been with Jesus and seen him raise the dead, cure the sick, feed thousands with a single blessing, they had never seen the REAL ONE.

Irony that on this day we also remember that other Terrible Beauty in Hiroshima.

Because Transfiguration is also a feast of death and destruction.

When we are faced, as I believe we all are at one time or another, with the power of the Transfiguration, we have two choices. We can choose to try to contain it: to enclose it in a little chapel, and make sure it knows its place. We can go in to visit for well-defined periods of time, and feel relieved to know that we can turn around and close the door firmly as we leave. That choice leads to the slow, tedious death that all mortals experience sooner or later.

Or we can choose to rush up the mountain, and hurl ourselves into the Uncreated Light, flinging ourselves with utter abandon into God. That choice also leads to death. The people around us may still think they see Leo or Jordan or Laura. But what they are now seeing is Christ in Peter's form. Jesus going about Jude's daily work. One of the Persons of the Holy Trinity singing in Robert's voice. As St. Paul said, "I am dead. It is now Christ living in me."

Reaching toward heaven, where his fingers shone like ten flames, Abba Joseph said, "If you will, you can become all flame." I'm not there yet, but I long to be.

The blessings of God's fiery and passionate being transfigure us all.

Your sister in Christ,
Laura