

# **\*August 6: Feast of the Transfiguration Hiroshima Day**

In the Catholic Church the two major feasts of August are the Transfiguration of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary. They are feasts of light, of celebrating a life and world transformed. In the secular calendar, August is also bookended by two days of commemoration: the anniversary of the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima on the same day as the Feast of the Transfiguration and the International Day against Nuclear Tests. These evoke a brief and terrible light followed by darkness, death and silence. Together, all four commemorations invite us to ask by what light we wish to guide our lives as human beings, as Catholics and as citizens of the world.

All these days invite us to attend both to life and death and to follow a path that holds them together. On the mountain Jesus is revealed in dazzling light as the Son of God. When he and his followers come down the mountain he speaks of the darkness of his coming arrest and death. The light that his disciples have seen prepares them for the horror of his death, and encourages them to hope in the transformed life revealed in his rising from the dead.

The events on the mountain, however, were not simply about Jesus. The light in which he appeared illuminated the whole mountain and all the people on it. The disciples not only saw Jesus transfigured but also Moses and Elijah. They represented the key moments of God's relationship to Israel – the time when, through Moses, God led people from slavery in Egypt, and the age when, through prophets like Elijah, he accompanied and taught people in periods of betrayal, conflict and exile. Their presence with Jesus suggested that Jesus was central in God's plan for people, and that the disciples would share in his glory. For a moment the disciples had a vision of a world transformed in harmony, clarity, love and joy, in which all things came together. No wonder Peter wanted to set up house on the mountain and to stay there forever! He had seen a glimpse of the world transfigured by the God whose coming Jesus had promised, a world in which he and the other disciples were to be involved in shaping.

When they came down from the mountain together, Jesus set them straight about the path that led to transfiguration. It lay through death and darkness. The readers of this story in the Gospel understood that they too had to choose between the destructive light of selfishness and conflict and God's light of making peace, of service and of harmony. The latter was the true light, and the path through it involved cost.

The story of the Transfiguration is relevant to our public life today. We have the technical skills to preserve and nurture the human world in all its variety and beauty. We have also the means of destroying it quickly by nuclear weapons or slowly by negligence in the face of climate change. We must choose between the two lights offered to guide us: that of unbridled individual choice and avarice with the enchanted dream castles that they offer, and the light of gratitude, respect, service and care for the common good. It is a crucial decision. It not only affects issues of war and peace but also the way in which we relate to the young people in the justice system whom we accompany at Jesuit Social Services, and the priorities we adopt in our response to the coronavirus.

**By Andrew Hamilton**