

Blessing of Transfiguration Mural - Catholic Chaplaincy, Lancaster University

14th May 2017,

5th Sunday of Easter

(Acts 6:1-7; 1Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-2)



The fundamental reason for the Church's existence is to preserve and hand on the memory of her founder, Jesus Christ. She sets before us the story of Jesus as found in the Scriptures, above all in the four gospels and the writings of the Apostles which we know as the New Testament. The memory of the Lord Jesus' words and deeds is kept afresh for us week after week in the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Mass. We meet him anew in the Scriptures and the breaking of bread, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Another means for keeping the memory of Jesus alive has been the Church's long patronage and encouragement of the arts in their broadest form, be it painting, sculpture or music, for example. We marvel at Fra Angelico's sublime depiction of the Annunciation, Caravaggio's striking painting of the call of the apostle Matthew, Rubens' Adoration of the Magi in Kings College, Cambridge. Michaelangelo's sculpture of the pieta in St. Peter's Basilica, depicting the dead Christ in the arms of his mother, offers a profound meditation in marble of the post-crucifixion scene. We may also mention the wonderful musical treasury exemplified in the Masses of Mozart, Beethoven, Hayden and so many others, all of which conspire to bring to life the Christian gospel.

That long and venerable tradition of Christian art has once more found expression in the chapel of this University chapel with the splendid representation of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. I compliment the artist and all who cooperated in its execution, and Fr. Conner for setting the initiative in motion in the first place. The Transfiguration was a key moment in the earthly life of Christ. He was on his last journey to Jerusalem where trial, crucifixion and death awaited him. His experience on the mountain, where he was joined by Moses and Elijah, those towering figures of the Old Testament, and where he received his Father's affirmation that he was his Son, undoubtedly enabled him to face the future and all that it held for him.

The Transfiguration scene is in truth a feast for the eyes. Just to pause quietly and let our eyes take in the details can of necessity only be a form of prayer, a raising of the mind and heart to higher things, in this instance, to Christ in glory. As we, and successive generations of students, look and reflect on this elevated and noble work of art, each person will have their own thoughts. What will be common to us all, however, is the hope represented by the majestic and glorious figure of Christ. We too one day will be transfigured and be like Christ in glory. This lovely work of art in Lancaster University Catholic Chaplaincy will undoubtedly play its part in the Church's work of keeping alive and fresh the memory of Christ.

+Michael G Campbell OSA

Bishop of Lancaster