

Homily for BBC Radio 4 'Sunday Worship' Broadcast

Sunday 2nd March 2014

Having moved to Wales when I became Archbishop of Cardiff three years ago, one of my great joys was to discover the richness and variety of its scenery and changing landscape. Its high mountains and green valleys certainly speak to me of the grandeur and majesty of God. The silence of hills can whisper the breath of God to all who wish to hear. The floods of recent months show the power and force of water which has both the capacity to refresh and nurture growth as well as the power of destruction. The wind of a gale can either invigorate the air we breathe, or it can become so severe that it threatens life and limb. The Celtic Church was, of course, familiar with the power of these wild elements. However, our Celtic forebears weren't as well protected as we are today. It's no accident that St. David was known as "Aquaticus" – the man of water. This nickname described his ability to stand in cold water for long periods of time which tested not just his physical endurance against the elements, but also his faith in God as he battled against temptation.

At different times and in different places I'm sure many of us have had the chance to stand and admire beautiful scenery and awesome mountains whether in our own land or further afield. The wonder of the natural world is ever popular in television programs, photographs, paintings and poems. They offer us great opportunities to think about the dramatic and wondrous nature of our planet, our place within it and, as Canon Peter said earlier, our responsibility to grow in communion with the Creator through the glories of his creation. But, beautiful though it is, finding God in creation isn't necessarily easy.

The foot of the mountains seem to emanate a sense of strength and stability, of strong foundations. But sometimes, fog, cloud and mist cover the summit of the mountains here in Wales and, for me, trying to see the shrouded peaks, hidden from the human eye, illustrates our search to understand the transcendent, the unknown, the mystery of God.

We know the summit is there, but actually seeing it gives us a sense of satisfaction and completeness. Experiencing its absence can give us a sense of wonder, awe and mystery. Those different emotions illustrate for me the fact that things which we think are clear can become more inaccessible, even more mysterious, the more we examine them.

Just by looking at ourselves in the mirror each morning we know "That's me". Yet how often we see ourselves in a photo and ask "Is that really

me". We see ourselves in a way different to how others see us. We think we know our own thoughts, but so often when we try to put those thoughts into words we find we can't express them properly. Often we say the wrong thing, or at the very least the words don't come out the way we want them to.

So the inner landscapes of our lives are sometimes confused and mysterious as well. If we find it difficult to understand ourselves, how much more difficult it is to understand others.

If that is our human experience, we mustn't be surprised at our difficulty at times in understanding or describing God. We try, of course. We say prayers. We sing hymns. We proclaim the Creed. We write books of theology. Some of the greatest works of music and religious art have tried to capture the mystery of God. But think of the experience of Moses as he stood before the Burning Bush. "Who shall I say you are" he asked. "Say I AM has called you". God cannot be defined by any name we choose, he cannot be contained by any description, even by any explanation.

The great twentieth century Welsh poet R.S. Thomas explored the paradox of the presence and the absence of God in the midst of creation. One commentator on his work writes: "Thomas finds ... God's reflection, his shadow and his echo existing in the Welsh hills. God's influence there is both a presence and an absence, and at times an absence that is like a presence."

Another Thomas, Doubting Thomas, refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he was able to put his fingers into the wounds of Christ made by the nails. Jesus reveals his wounds and tells Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." R.S. Thomas explores this reality in his poem 'In Church'. It's followed by the anthem "Ubi Caritas et Amor" in a setting by Maurice Durufle in Latin. Where is it possible to find God? In charity and love.