

28th November 2021 – First Sunday of Advent

Mirror

**“If you but know well how to compose your picture
it will also seem a natural thing seen in a great mirror.”**
Leonardo da Vinci, Notebooks, ‘The Precepts of a Painter’

The West Highland Museum (see www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk) in Fort William was founded in 1922 by a group of Lochaber folk who wanted to “create a museum of and for the West Highlands, second to none in the whole country”. The Museum's collections tell the story of the region and its history, including the effects of political warfare, the economic impact of tourism and the coming of the industrial age. At the heart of the Museum there's a collection which relates to Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobite cause, including an artefact which has fascinated me since I was a small boy – a secret painting of the outlawed “Young Pretender”.

After the Battle of Culloden in 1746 at the end of “The ‘45 Jacobite Rebellion”, it was treasonable to support the Stuart claim to the throne. At a secret gathering of Jacobite sympathisers, loyal friends of Prince Charles could place a tray on the table which appeared to be a mess of mixed colours. But when a mirrored-glass cylinder was placed in the centre, an image of the Prince appeared. The Jacobites could then toast “The King over the water” round his reflected likeness. If there was a danger of discovery, the device could quickly be dismantled, and the tray would again appear as a meaningless blur or be replaced by a similar decoy tray.

For me today, this remarkable exhibit is a metaphor for the beginning of Advent. So much of our lives can be a meaningless blur, a jumble that makes little sense. We look this way and that, squinting and turning, to try to get some clarity out of the confusion of colours before us, a picture of “God with us”. Occasionally we see something that's clear, but it never seems to be complete. Then a mirror is placed right in the centre as the Incarnate Christ comes among us. And, lo and behold, a clear image appears before our eyes. Where once there was a jumbled mess, there is now a wonder to admire. Where once what we saw made little or no sense, there is now clarity, when the real picture is revealed.

*For more information on the Prince Charlie painting, see
https://highlandobjects.wordpress.com/2020/05/13/may-2020-object-7/?like_comment=331*

A prayer for today

If Christ reveals what God is really like, let me take time to stand and be amazed. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>