

In today's gospel passage we are told that the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But this is not fear as we would understand it: actually, it means 'awe'; in Greek the word is *theosebeia* and it is the same word used when Moses encounters the burning bush. Like the disciples, Moses was awestruck.

By what? By the holy. Moses and the three disciples in today's reading were awestruck by the presence of the holy.

The German philosopher Rudolf Otto described the holy as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and said it has three characteristics:

i) it is 'totally other', something absolutely 'not us', entirely different from anything we experience in ordinary life; ii) it fills us with awe – it is awe-inspiring, awesome, and we are awestruck into silent reverence; iii) it draws us into itself, graciously and lovingly.

The word Otto used to describe an encounter with the holy is 'numinous'.

Anyone who has seen Steven Spielberg's film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* will have also seen a perfect visual depiction of the numinous: the encounter with the extra-terrestrials towards the end of the film is almost like a religious experience – the scientists stand dumb, their mouths open, their eyes shining... amazingly, with something approaching love. But then, Spielberg has always known what he is doing.

But what does 'holy' mean?

The word has its roots in a cluster of terms that describe a state of *wholeness*: the German *heil*, the Anglo-Saxon *hal* and *halig*, the Latin *sanctus* coming from *sanus*, which is 'health'. All these words mean entire, whole, complete, in a state of equilibrium; so the deepest meaning of 'holiness' is 'wholeness', of being 'sound' in the sense of being totally complete and lacking nothing. It isn't a matter of quantity but quality: it is a wholeness of being. Holiness had nothing to do with being pious and trying to like everyone and be nice to people – that's the quickest path to neurosis.

Each one of us is called to wholeness and, by the grace of God, in the end it shall be ours. But what do we do here and now, on our *journey towards* wholeness?

Carl Jung said: “Wholeness is not achieved by cutting off a portion of one’s being, but by integration of the opposites.” Actually, St Nicholas of Cusa said it about 600 years before Jung, and he called it ‘the coincidence of contraries’. He said that’s what God is: the reconciliation of all opposites in a perfect wholeness of being.

Well, for example, take the opposites of compassion and anger... living with the contraries of compassion and anger within ourselves – this could mean getting angry about the right things, injustice and inequality, not denying our anger but integrating it; or living with the contraries of human sympathy and prejudice within ourselves – which could mean coming to truly appreciate the feelings of those who suffer prejudice and doing something about it, not refusing to acknowledge our prejudice but integrating it; or living with the

contraries of sexuality and spirituality – those two have for so long been seen as opposites – which could mean developing a deeper understanding of the nature of the Incarnation and the beauty of creation, not attempting to stifle our sexual feelings, but integrating them.

In ways like these – and other ways, too, we are gradually transformed by God's own hand, slowly made whole by his love. And it absolutely is love that works this transformation, because in his transfiguration Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah, the two great representatives of the law and the prophets. And Jesus himself says the entire meaning of the law and the prophets is love. So when Peter and the other disciples are overcome with awe in the presence of the holy, the numinous, they are in the truest sense overcome in the presence of love. That's how we know what love is in our own lives: we're overcome by it. Love, in the end, overcomes everything: even the horror and cruelty and

violence that is presently being inflicted on the Ukraine: it will be overcome.