

Along the track

Mist

Fogs and mists were very much part of my childhood. When Winter came and with it the mists and more often fog that often accompanied it, our father used to send us down the hill to see what sort of a day it was. The fog could sit over us for days. There's a big difference between fog and mist, though. They are both made up of tiny water droplets but mist is less dense than fog, so it is easier to see more clearly through it. So it is not a surprise that over time, mist has been used by writers of horror stories, romantic novelists, poets or religious writers to convey deeper meanings.

Mist was often used to signal the presence of the sacred. Often that holy mountain Sinai was shrouded in mist. Pillars of fire and cloud or mist are said to have guided the Israelites through the desert during the Exodus from Egypt. The pillar of cloud provided a visible guide for the Israelites during the day, while the pillar of fire lit their way by night. On the other hand, mist brings with it stillness, and it can make even the most familiar places seem eerie and 'other', it can appear to soften even the harshest features of the land. Somehow it seems to make the world a bit more gentle, less rugged and confronting, sometimes even bestowing on the harshest terrain a beauty of its own.

The book of Genesis describes the very dawn of creation when there were no plants and no rain and no-one to work the ground, 'but a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground' Genesis 2:6.

That quote from Scripture has been used by many writers who help us map our spiritual journey. They use the idea of mist to enlighten us along the way. Mist is a reminder that God's work in our world does not usually come with trumpets and fanfare nor does it make the flashy headlines. God doesn't break into our journey or into our hearts and minds by showy displays but rather more like this mist at the dawn of creation, God stays around, quietly waiting, touching us through the movements of creation, even the simplest of them. I read the following on the back of a book some time ago: *Rising up from the water was a layer of mist, gently moving with the currents of air and rising to follow the sun. And, somehow, I felt some of my anxieties of the day lifting with it.*

Mist can appear in the oddest of places and at the most unexpected times. Around where I live, it is not unusual to turn a corner out towards the mountains and find mist lying quietly in a valley at different times during the day, long after it has disappeared elsewhere. That too is a reminder that often God waits for us to return, just like the image of God offered by the father in the story of the Prodigal Son. Like that lingering mist, God waits and quietly surrounds us in times of anxiety or pain, coming into our hearts and minds helping us to be still, to forgive, to soften the harsh times when all seems lost.

In the words of Fr Ronald Rolheiser:
God works more discretely, in quiet, touching our soul, conscience, and that part inside of us where we still unconsciously bear the memory of once, long before birth, being touched, caressed, and loved by God."

And there are times when we need reminding that we are loved by God, in fact we have been loved by God even before we were born. In the words of the psalm 139, *When You thought about me, God, well before I was being made in secret, Your eyes could see not just my unformed substance and You could foresee my future actions, even before I came into being.*

Sometimes mist may appear to block the way, to obscure our vision, to make us wary, afraid even. That's not a bad thing either if this situation makes us stop, rethink and look more closely, to change our vision even. Mist can be the very thing needed to make us change direction, to find another path, the road less travelled. God still waits to walk with us there too.

Regards
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