

## 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT

## Year C

*A Man For All Seasons* made Robert Bolt internationally famous as a playwright, but by the early 1960's, Bolt had established himself as a major writer of serious screenplays. He wrote *Lawrence of Arabia* (1961-2), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), *A Man For All Seasons* (1966) *Ryan's Daughter* (1970) and others. *Doctor Zhivago* gained him an Academy Award, as did the screenplay of *A Man For All Seasons*. The film of the play was in fact the outstanding triumph of 1967, taking in all no less than six Academy Awards. In 1972, Bolt was made a Commander of the British Empire.

But there is one incident in 1961 which became for Bolt a personal moral crisis. It offers a striking parallel to that of the protagonist in his most famous work, and is revealing of Bolt's personality and attitudes.

The two decades after the Second World War were the most intense of what became known as the "Cold War", the highly dangerous stand-off of undeclared hostilities between the Soviet Union ( and its satellites and allies in the Communist bloc) and the USA (and its allies, including Britain and to a much lesser extent Australia). The Americans had acquired and used nuclear weapons of mass destruction in 1945 (Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The Soviets gained the technology shortly after the war. The next decade saw a frightening build up of nuclear missiles on both sides of the conflict, to the point where both sides effectively had the capability (if a Third World War broke out) of ending human life on Earth.

In this grim context, Bolt joined a group called the "Committee of a Hundred", formed by the great British philosopher Bertrand Russell, dedicated to peace and nuclear disarmament. Since such pressure groups could have no effect on the USSR, it amounted to saying "let us throw away our weapons on principle – while the other side keeps theirs." It was an idealist position, very much at odds with popular opinion and government policy. At Russell's insistence, Bolt and others in the group deliberately involved themselves in "illegal" protests and landed in gaol, as planned. At the time, by a twist of fate, Bolt was writing the screenplay for "Lawrence of Arabia." His imprisonment was a disaster for the production schedule. Producer Sam Spiegel turned up in prison, demanding that Bolt renounce his stand and finish the script. Spiegel's words were oddly reminiscent of *A Man For All Seasons*: "So have these people – film crew and actors – got to

lose their jobs and lose thousands of dollars just so that you can go to heaven when you die?” Under this pressure, Bolt signed to say he would not protest again, and was released from prison. His shame at capitulating (as he saw it) was such that he gave away the money he earned on the film to charity.

For Robert Bolt that was a transforming experience – an experience of transfiguration perhaps. Like Thomas More, he came face to face with his own weakness and betrayal of his integrity – and changed as a result.

When we speak of “The Transfiguration” we usually refer to the strange event to which we have just listened. However “Transfiguration” is not a solitary event in the Gospel but one that happens over and over again. Throughout his public ministry Jesus transfigured many people – the broken, the wounded, and the wayward. He called to the deepest part of people and transfigured them by the power of God’s love, the same power that transfigured Jesus himself. For Jesus that experience was getting closer to who he really was.... The one who was called by God and named by God in love: “My Son, the Chosen One.”

We can understand transfiguration better when we ask: “what would it take to transfigure *us*? What would it take to transfigure the people we know? Who calls our name in love? Whose name do we call in love? In our Lenten journey we are asked to transfigure each other by the power of God’s love in us.

We are all called to the ministry of transfiguration!