The Sacred in the Ordinary

In her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson's main character the elderly Reverend Ames reflects on the sacred quality of human experience:

> *I feel sometimes as if I were a child who opens its eyes on the world once and sees amazing things it will never know any names for and then has to close its eyes again. I know this is all apparition compared to what awaits us, but it is only lovelier for that. There is a human beauty in it. And I can't believe that, when we have all been changed and put on incorruptibility, we will forget our fantastic condition of mortality and impermanence, the great bright dream of procreating and perishing that meant the whole world to us. In eternity this world will be Troy, I believe, and all that has passed here will be the epic of the universe, the ballad they sing in the streets. Because I don't imagine any reality putting this one in the shade entirely, and I think piety forbids me to try.*

Botticelli chasuble

Reverend Ames' intuition seems so right. Our experience of what is amazing or extraordinary in its beauty and otherness always points us toward "the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God." For God most high has come to dwell with us in Christ, and this world is his sacred dwelling. The "amazing things"— the beauty in human experience and in all of creation — beckon to us and draw us in the "Spirit's tether" to God in Christ who is constantly seeking opportunities to engage us.

Our "piety," like that of Reverend Ames, demands an awareness of "our fantastic condition of mortality and impermanence." Certainly this takes place above all during the Sacred Liturgy when God reveals his presence in Word and Sacrament. There heaven and earth meet. The beauty of liturgical vesture reminds of this "fantastic" sacramental union of the human and divine. When we hear the Word, when eat of the Bread and drink of the Chalice, we proclaim with every fiber of our being that Mercy has found us, eternity has interrupted, divinity has intervened.

Transfiguration chasuble

Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2004) 57.
Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists, 1999, no. 12, www.vatican.va/…ii/letters/…/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists_en.html.