

Friends

This Tuesday, the 16th of June, is the date that the first woman made it into space. In 1963, the Soviet cosmonaut Valentina V. Tereshkova was launched on a solo mission aboard the spacecraft Vostok 6. She spent more than 70 hours orbiting Earth, two years after Yuri Gagarin's first human-crewed flight in space.

I wonder if she felt something of the ecstasy expressed in John Gillespie Magee's poem "High Flight (An Airman's Ecstasy)". Magee was an Anglo-American fighter pilot who served in the Royal Canadian Air Force and died at the tragically young age of 19 while flying his Spitfire in England. The poem ends:

Up, up the long, delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or ever eagle flew –
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

We may never experience what it is like to fly in space, or to pilot a small aircraft, but we too have experienced something of the feeling of putting out our hand and touching the face of God. It may be in worship, or the first time we hold a newborn child. Whatever it is, and it's probably a bit different for each of us, there are those moments when we feel the nearness of God with great clarity. We "lift our eyes to the hills from whence comes our help" and we know that our help does indeed come "from the Lord, who has made heaven and earth." As we remember the achievement of Valentina Tereshkova this week, it is worth also remembering that she became a politician and voted for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Humans do not make good heroes – our feet are all too obviously made of clay – but it is perhaps that striving to touch the divine which makes us unique.

God bless, Vicci