

The freedom to grow

We have just waved our middle daughter off on a school trip to Germany. Along with 80 other Year 9 students, she is off to the Rhineland - her first ever trip abroad with school. She was so very excited about this amazing adventure that was about to begin and I was nervous about letting her go.

As we waited with all of the other parents and siblings to wave them off, there was a great sense of anticipation amongst the children in the coach. For many, this was their first time abroad without their families. They were chatting and waving, getting up, sitting down and straining to see our faces for the last time for a while. When the driver beeped his horn loudly, a huge roar went up from the waiting children..... and they were gone.

My learning heart was penetrated in this short moment with a deep awareness of the grace of God's presence in the scene in the school yard today. In the smiles and waves of delight, in the nervous goodbyes, in the tears of younger siblings was an intensity of divine loveliness that our Christian faith assures us is the very presence of God. St Augustine described this when he said, 'The love with which God loves us is the same love with which we love one another.'

This love is not a controlling and stifling love. It is a love that allows for the freedom to grow. It is a love that calls and searches us to become our true, 'God like' selves. It was shining from the faces and hearts of the parents who were gently and lovingly letting their children experience life away from them and from the children who were bravely setting out on their travels. In this departure, this 'setting off' into the unknown, it was their true 'God like selves' that the young people were revealing to those around.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks once again to the disciples and urges them to understand and accept that, '...I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.'

'I am in you.'

It is God incarnate that is within us, urging us and calling us towards the goal to develop and grow in faith and love. Of deepening who we are. Rainer Maria Rilke in her poem, *The Journey*, says:

Driven by your senses, dare. To the edge of longing, grow.

God's plans for us are bigger and wilder than we could ever imagine and if we dare to believe this then somehow we start to let go of our worries about the journey we are making and trust in God and his desires for us. This is not something to be feared. It is exciting.

As I go down into the deep of my own being, show me the hidden things.

Take me down to the spring of my life, and tell me my nature and my name.

Give me freedom to grow so that I may become my true self –the fulfilment of the seed which you planted in me at my making.

George Appleton

There is a lovely story about St Francis of Assisi:

One day he walked up to an almond tree and said,

'Speak to me of God'.

The tree blossomed.

This essence to blossom is within each of us. It is in the hearts and souls of the young people on the coach today. They were experiencing something of God's creativity in their setting out, in the fears they were overcoming, in the delights they were experiencing. And in all these ways they were becoming more fully human and so more divine.

So, like the departing youngsters this morning, we too are given the freedom to grow, to dare to spread our wings, to blossom and begin to experience life in a new way. By really trusting in God's love for us and allowing God's grace and power to stream within us and from us then we will experience this freedom more fully and our lives will truly, 'Speak of God.'

