

## February 2014

### Glad New Day

*Each morning we can choose the quality of the day ahead*



'Don't ask her now. She hasn't had her morning coffee yet.' We have all met such people. Maybe we are one of them. Some people are lethal until they get the first 'fix' of the day – a cuppa, a cigarette, the media news. I had a parish priest once, an awkward man – may he rest in peace – who was testy and unapproachable until 10.00 am. He lived by the clock. Each morning, his rising, praying, saying Mass, breakfasting, toileting were invariable. All his movements were timed by either nature, grace or habit, to the second. You could set your watch by any of them. During those precarious hours we used to circle him carefully, as you would an unpredictable monarch or a wounded lion, until, at the appointed time, he granted his curates a brief window of opportunity for bringing our petitions before him.

Some people are at their best in the morning; others blossom in the late evening; a few give little evidence of any interest at all in the day's proceedings. What we do, think and say, first thing in the morning, the saints tell us, deeply colours the rest of the day. When I was a child we were taught to 'make our Morning Offering'. It was a kind of statement of intent. No matter what, our dawn promise to God would hold true. Once we managed to get it right after we woke up, then everything would be right all day long. In his Sabbath, Wayne Muller quotes an old Hasidic poem:

*Take special care to guard your tongue before the Morning Prayer.  
A person who wakes up in the morning is like a new creation.  
All of your words each day are related to one another.  
All of them are rooted in the first words that you speak.*

'We should apprentice ourselves to coming awake,' the poet David Whyte writes, 'treat it as a form of mastery. The threshold of waking, the entry to the day, is the musician's foot lifted to begin the beat. Miss that beat and you will have to come to a stop, and start again. The dash and flair of the day comes from that foot hitting the floor after the correct restful anticipation. Sometimes a prayerful, painful approach to a difficult day may mean stopping and starting a hundred times, until we learn, like a virtuoso, the thorough, attentive, rhythmic presence of the true musician.'



Fear can ruin our timing – and energy. There are those who dread the arrival of each new day, their stomach already in a knot. The shadows that surface at night continue to haunt us in the light. Too many of us, quietly and hopelessly, wake up to another day of silent despair. Yet every morning provides an opportunity to begin again, to stand on another mountain with a whole new perspective, to refuse to settle for what at first sight seems inevitable.



For everyone there is another chance to decide what the day, and the rest of our lives, will be like; a choice about what to set down on the blank page handed to us by each dawn; will it be a sad sequel to yesterday's spent words – or a unique work of art? Every new morning, New Week, New Year, New Spring, offers us a choice – do we dance it, or do we endure it?

Just as we still struggle with the mystery of how a divine incarnation could happen in an ordinary little baby in a very ordinary place in the course of our ordinary time, so too, even while raising the morning coffee-cup to our lips, we continue to struggle with the shocking belief that the cloud of our fears and despair can be dispersed from our hearts by the healing shaft of light we call God. It is the very ordinariness of the timing of the incarnate God that confounds us.

There is something essentially Paschal about concepts such as newness, beginning, beginning again. Few faiths carry such compassionately repeated opportunities for personal and universal repair, recovery and renewal. And the realisation of this redemption from the night of our fears and losses, can steal into, or slam into, our consciousness while we are busy washing our faces or brushing our teeth. True to the essence of incarnation, the whole economy of our salvation is revealed through the tiny spaces between our fleeting preoccupations.

With the precision of a skilled surgeon, God's fingers find the fissures in our attention. It is difficult to capture in logical prose the divine pleading, the urgent invitation that lies waiting just below the surface of our conscious preoccupations. Like Thomas, we are so slow to believe. Yet this vision, this reality is, no more, no less, what the Christian faith means.

Our wildest dreams, which may well be God's dreams too, are within our grasp if, for instance, even between showering and waking the children, we can, with a dogged loyalty, simply utter a heartfelt 'yes.' Another opportunity! 'Life contains a lot of evils,' wrote Atisa in 1007, 'as fragile as a bubble cast up by a wave. How marvellous to wake from sleep still breathing and say "I'm awake! There's still time!" Our souls and bodies will be different then, as we approach the table of our kitchen, the table of our day, the table of our world.

A fierce energy seizes our soul in that innocent moment, the 'Prime' of the monks' Office, when we allow the lover's whisper to vibrate within us: 'With me, this morning, there is nothing you cannot do. I have already examined your day. My love enfolds you; there is no reason to fear.' Is not this inner thrust of personal liberation, and the astonishing conviction that we can transform the world, what our next celebration of Easter and Pentecost will be about as well? 'Why then,' we may ask ourselves as we wait for the windscreen to de-ice, 'do we so limply succumb to the negative charge of our thoughts and feelings?' Capable of achieving all things, every day, in the Saviour who always delivers, we too often settle again for the victim role, familiar and deadly.



'How we greet the dawn is a measure of the freedom we have made for ourselves,' writes Whyte. 'Freedom in the midst of imprisonment, freedom in the midst of all the catastrophes common to the sins of humankind, the hidden made glorious by sudden visibility ... One of Blake's most famous engravings is of a young man leaping out of the picture with a great blaze of light behind him, called The Glad Day. It carries enormous energy and youthful power, as if the youth is leaping right in our face to ask us what we are up to on this glad day.'

I think of the Morning- Christ wrenching us from the tomb of our nights, bringing us to the threshold of a sweet freedom. Do you ever move into your glad day with the inner authority of that young man? Or feel in your deepest soul the fulfilment of your own promise?

Ben Okri writes:

*Every day is a new day, a new calendar.  
You must begin today to remake  
Your mental and spiritual world...  
Only free people can make a free world.  
Infect the world with your light.  
Don't be afraid to love or to be loved.  
As within, so without.*

