

July 2011

Catching the Rhythm of Things

Our bodies resonate with the pulse of the earth. Nature is our spiritual guide

Relentlessly returning to re-gather along the horizon, Tonn Clíodhna, the white horses of the sea, in froth and fury, come driving fiercely towards me, only to vanish, like a breath, into the sand at my feet. This is the strand in Owenahincha, a tiny toe touching the warm skin of the Atlantic. To the east lies Inchadowney, to the north Reenascreena. Close your eyes and these place names will bring a smile to your face.



It is easy here, in this hidden haven on the south west coast of Ireland, to swing and sway to the summer winds and to the rhythm of the sea. It is retreat time organized annually by our dear friend Sr. Brigid O'Flannagan RSM. I'm here with a group of people for whom the tension and intensity of their daily lives are almost too much. Indeed they are not alone. Our media speaks of this dilemma daily.

Reflecting here between our sessions, it occurs to me that too many of us are suffering from a new virus – the virus of alienation from our roots. Like swans on dry land, we are unsure and unsteady. We are no longer in our element. There is a deep disorientation because the compass that reveals to us our place in the grand scheme of things is out of true. We forget that we are part of a wider web.

Dylan Thomas wrote:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower

Drives my green age ...

The force that drives the water through the rocks

Drives my red blood.

All ground is holy ground. The land we stand on is sacred; we are connected to it and part of it. All we need, in our fretting and worrying, is to realise this truth, to be intensely aware of the connectedness of all things. It is in this connectedness to all things and creatures that we are connected to God. That is when we find a deep peace and freedom. It is only, as Sam Keen has written, when 'the moon rises in my blood, and suns are born and burst in the atoms of my substance, and I am one body with the world' that a profound joy fills the wells of my being.

Keeping those wells clear, clean and fresh is the work of contemplation – of stilling the disturbing thoughts, of staying free of the anxious images, of becoming quiet enough to find a whole new perspective on all that is going on in our lives. It is more like a dropping downwards, a sinking below the conscious waves of tumult, than a desperate conflict at the level of endless, mental arguments.

When we breathe into our restlessness and dis-ease, there is an immediate shift in our self-awareness. It can happen quite quickly. This is an experience of tangible grace: it is the inner place to which Jesus went when it all became too much for him. Jesus was forever trying to overcome his fear of his demons. Not all of us try so hard. We carry a fear of depth. Many would rather perish on the surface than explore the unknown within.

We are focusing here, during these long warm days of our summer retreat, on finding harmony within ourselves by falling in tune and time with the pulse of nature, of the sky and of the sea. This, we feel sure, is where the regaining of balance, of healing and of peace begins. It is the way of creation and incarnation. It is the way of sacrament. It is the way of the mystics. It is the way of God. Including, but transcending all hands-on remedies, therapies and medication for restoring our peace of mind, for mitigating the damage caused by pressure and stress, the basic rhythm of our lives holds the key to our overall well-being. Only connect. Otherwise there is no groundedness, rootedness or inner freedom.

To place oneself in the middle of what Rabindranath Tagore calls the Stream of Life is to feel a new power and perspective, a healthy confidence and balance in the current of one's destiny, even with all its shadowy nooks and crannies, its alarming twists and turns, its many cul-de-sac and its roads less travelled.

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures

It is your same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and flow.

Here in Owenahincha, whether feeling the spray of the ocean during the day or hearing its unique and muted murmur at night, we all felt an affinity with mystery. The sea and the soul are spiritual sisters. They call to each other. They need each other. The soul needs form and context. The sea needs to be named and experienced. This is why the spiritual is also physical – it spreads along the arteries of the embodied soul, through the seasons and turnings of the universe itself.

Moving to the tempo of the tides each morning, it was easy to visualise God's healing power touching our minds and caressing our troubled hearts. From our innermost centre where the Blessed Trinity lives, and from the mysterious love pressing on us from all around, all we had to do was to surrender to the truth of reality, to the embrace of the present moment, to the way things are. With practice it becomes easier, this experience of our essence, this sensing of the healing heartbeat of God in the silent pulse of our attentive presence – the rhythm of our breathing, the rhythm of our being, the rhythm of God. Leaving aside what Eckhart Tolle calls the 85 per cent of our thinking that contributes only to our fears, we discover another place of tranquillity inside us. Open to this overwhelming, but shy and subtle presence, this God-Being, an extraordinary sense of peace and confidence fills our soul.

In *Variation on a Theme by Rilke* Denise Levertov wrote:

A certain day became a presence to me;
there it was, confronting me – a sky, air, light;
a being. And before it started to descend
from the height of noon, it leaned over
and struck my shoulder as if with
the flat of a sword, granting me
honour and a task. The day's blow
rang out, or it was I, a bell awakened,
and what I heard was my whole self
saying and singing what it knew: **I CAN.**

