

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 15th August Angels and Demons

'I wish those angels and demons would finally get off my back. One's trying to take a piece of me, the other to heal the heart. Night and morning you're in my head.'

Peter Andre may be reflecting on his own troubled life when he wrote these words for his CD Angels and Demons

When I was small I could've written those words too. On my left shoulder, I was told, there was a nasty demon whispering bad things in my ear. On my right side a holy angel whispering good things. This went on for years and when I was old enough to go to confession it brought me even greater misery. This 'tug-of-the-heart' goes on in all of us, as though two people were living within us. One is negative, vain vindictive ego. The other is more open, wise and discerning self. We need to give ourselves a chance to tune into and discern the thoughts and value of both voices. In the Tibetan book of Living and Dying, Sogyal Rinpoche writes, 'As the voice of your discriminating awareness grows stronger and clearer, you will start to distinguish between its truth and the various deceptions of that other voice, and you will be able to listen to it with confidence.' The more often you listen to this wise guide, he counsels, the more easily he will be able to ignore the false guide. Saint Paul was only too familiar with those voices. Keep in mind the fact that he did not choose the good he was attracted to; instead he did what he knew was wrong. (Romans 7:19).

Even Jesus in the desert, as recounted by Luke, was deeply disturbed by the urgency of the tempter's voice, before hearing the empowering voice of his father deeper still within him. This inner work may break our hearts. It broke the hearts of saints, mystics and writers as they struggled with those intimate whispers of the fragile, complex souls, now drawn to the darkness, now to the saving light. We may have read the honest stories of heroes' and heroines' journeys-the confusion, tension and then the discernment of visionaries such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Therese of Avila, Thomas Merton, Henry Nouwen, Catherine de Hueck-Doherty. They have all chronicled the infinite vigilance needed to overcome the seduction of the ego voice that plate them even at the most spiritual moments.

Jesus's own heart was worn out after the duel with his demons in the desert. It was tormented again, as we are reminded when, broken and bleeding in the garden, one voice is saying refuse the chalice, the other urging him to accept it. And on Good Friday, limp on the cross, when the deadly voice of despair whispered that his Father had abandoned him, the other reached deeper- 'Into your hands I commit my spirit.'

What or who is the source of the inner voices you listen to every day of your life. Are they from your false self or your true self, your ego or your essence, your demon or angel? Each small example of how we respond as a mirror of our bigger decisions. How we decide about anything is how we decide about everything. Those daily decisions disclose our fundamental options. Each fleeting moment of the chance of salvation. Redemption in every nanosecond.

We are stuck in Stirling railway station on a cold Friday afternoon. The relief train has just arrived and we're all crowding around the door. I'm texting Kinnoull retreat centre with the news that I'll be late. *'Hey you get out of the B***way'* The word exploding in my ears like a firecracker. The red mist descended. Without posing to make that space for grace, I hissed back, *'Oh shut your face.'* I was profoundly shocked at myself and then found myself sitting next to that man for the rest of the journey to Perth.

I partially forgive myself for my impulsive and shabby reaction but what still hurts is this: during the 30 minutes to Perth I knew I could heal the situation, say sorry, shake hands, smile as we parted. But I did not. The man left without a word of peace from me. A chance of redemption for us both with squandered forever. The nasty, revengeful, infantile voice had won the day. And I was on my way to guide 70 trusting, lovely people about, choosing life!

Judy Cannato wrote in her *Field of Compassion*, 'Life is life to the full is possible, but not without our choosing it one small action at a time.' Examples of these glimmers of grace abound in daily life. There is the moment you decide to forgive someone for a past hurt and then, the following day, it all comes back to you again, and you change your mind. In a moment of inner freedom with a real friend, you feel the urge to reveal an old secret that has held you hostage for ages, and then the voice of fear drags you back to silence. 'It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities,' said Dumbledore to Harry Potter.

Angels and Demons inhabit everyone's heart. No heart is full of angels alone, or Demons alone. From his own experience, Jesus knew this. 'Let the weeds and wheat grow together,' he said. (Matthew 13:30.) Even in the holiest humans one cannot exist without the other. The greater the light the greater the shadow. What is important is that we listen to both intently. And no matter how mindful we may be, discerning their message is never easy. Why is this? Because the voices of the heart are ambiguous even deceptive. When dealing with our demons we are often 'entertaining Angels unawares' (Hebrews 13:2) Messengers of mystery wear many masks. Persian mystic Rumi reminds us to keep an open mind:

This human being as a guest house
Every morning on your arrival
Enjoy, depression, a meanness -
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all
. . . Be grateful for whoever comes because
Each has been sent
as a guide from beyond

(From Daniel's notes for a retreat)

