

Daniel's Reflection for Week Beginning 24th April , 2016 - Another Place?

There are certain threshold moments when we sense something of this destiny to which we are called. Such moments unsettle us. We long to hear the cantus firmus (the enduring melody) sound louder in our souls, for that vague horizon of our ultimate vocation to become clearer in our hearts. And there will always be one autumn in our lives when this restless compulsion for completion seems particularly compelling. Urgently we seek to see the whole picture while there's time, to accomplish the calling.

And so I'm just moving my home to another place. 'Another Place' is the name given by the sculptor Antony Gormley to his creation of one hundred cast-iron figures of men in the sea near Crosby, Merseyside. That is actually the neighbourhood I'm moving into. I will call my new home Ait Eile (pronounced 'ought ella'), the Irish words for 'another place'.

Why 'Another Place'? Gormley explains that his many creations, set in the most unexpected surroundings, are questions about the mystery of being, explorations into the meaning of our humanity, existential reflections around the essence of our lives. It is, he says, a call to the liminal spaces of our existence, an invitation to transcend our ways of being and seeing, bringing 'an extra dimension to our everyday common experience'.

Sometimes I see this present time in my life as the last chance to discover that other place where the light lives; that promised land towards which we are forever dedicated; that unfamiliar vantage point discerning the true north of our scrambled vision. And yet, is it really so unfamiliar after all? Maybe it is not another place that's new, but another way of being present in the place we have always known. Maybe the shores we search for do not belong to a foreign land, but were already glimpsed in the original vision of the divine child that lives in us all.

'Fear not,' said Thomas Merton to Karl Barth in a conversation about music and wisdom, 'though you have grown up to be a theologian, Christ remains a child in you ... there is in us a Mozart who will be our salvation.' It is the child who holds and reveals the cantus firmus in us, who remembers God's dream for us. The task is to recover this child – through waiting, praying and above all by suffering. This enterprise costs us, as T.S. Eliot puts it, 'not less than everything'.

In a monastery in Braga, Tibet, the poet David Whyte was astonished at the compassion in the carved faces along the walls, lit by handheld lamps, carrying 'such love in solid wood'. He wished that all of us would allow the invisible carver's hand 'to bring the deep grain of love to the surface'. And is this when the inner child awakens too? Do we reach our original, essential vocation and destiny only when pain and joy become one within us? Whyte ends his poem 'The faces at Braga':

*Our faces would fall away
until we, growing younger toward death
every day, would gather all our flaws in celebration*

*to merge with them perfectly,
impossibly, wedded to our essence,
full of silence from the carver's hands* (Treasured and Transformed p93, 94)