

1. Week Beginning 7th September 2014 Artists - Making the Invisible Visible

To see God in the everyday, the divine in the worldly, the transcendent in the ordinary we call on the artist to help us, the artist as painter, and as painter of secular pictures. How do the works of the famous artists of our time, like 'secular parables,' speak about God? Even where the artist has no theological interests, how, in the light of faith, does the work empower the viewer to see things differently, especially, for the Christian, something of the numinous, of the face of God?

In his Letter to Artists (1999) Pope John Paul II wrote, 'none can sense more deeply than you artists, ingenious creators of beauty that you are, something of the pathos with which God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands. A glimmer of that feeling has shone so often in your eyes when – like the artists of every age – captivated by the hidden power of sounds and words, colours and shapes, you have admired the work of your inspiration, sensing in it some echo of the mystery of creation with which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished to associate you ... With loving regard, the divine artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom, calling him to share in his creative power.' . . .

Because God became incarnate in creation and in humanity, it is in these time-and-space realities that we find a way into Mystery. . . In a lecture Christian artist Wendy Beckett spoke about Sally Warner, an American contemporary painter, who draws trees, brushwood, stone – which are luminous with God. she also talked about William Bailey, another, older American, who paints jugs and kitchen vessels and a wooden table with a sacramental strength that is overpowering. 'Avigdor Arikha,' Beckett went on, 'an Israeli, can show us a bare wall, a broom, bottles, young women, rooms and stairways, or scattered shoes and socks, and the viewer is seized by the wonder of what is seen. No attempt is made to glorify the shoes and socks. But the artist has seen their simple quiddity, their truth to their own nature, their materiality, as purely beautiful.'

Whenever art captures the core being, the truth, the 'isness' or interiority of anything, there too is a moment of divine revelation. It is only in the authenticity of 'what is' that the face of the Christian God can be glimpsed. The radical role of the artist is to keep reminding us of that. Where the Church fails, the artist is often the one who brings a graced seeing into a superficial looking, a blessed hearing into a shallow listening.

(*Treasured and Transformed* pp 165,166,167)