

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 1st January 2017

Be Bold and Choose

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In the first month of the new year, millions are ready to overcome their natural fears of the unknown and throw off the habit of the familiar, to embrace a journey that requires patience, determination and boldness to change not only the way of looking at life but life itself.

It is very early on the first day of the year. Intent and attentive, I'm sitting here at the window of my new home. The dark sea stretches before me. Out at the edges, the shifting shadows slowly reveal the shores of dawn. And deep at the centre of my being, I strongly sense the stirrings of a new beginning. I both love and fear these beginnings of the soul. They require courage – courage to live differently, to disturb the routines, to reach beyond, to question our glib absolutes. We carry a great fear of change. But habit is often a false comfort. Everything about great religion calls us to explore depth. Everything about great souls does so, too. 'If you continue to do what you have always done,' wrote professional strategist Anthony Robbins, 'you will continue to get what you have always got.' When everyone is thinking the same, no one is thinking very much. The theologian Bernard Lonergan wrote of a human condition that blocks our openness to vision and wisdom. He reckons that we all have a personal 'scotoma', a blind spot that we develop to ward off knowledge that might upset our customary way of viewing things. Our relentless resistance to change results from the original sin of a personal and institutional fear.

Maybe the poet-priest John O'Donohue had something similar in mind when he believed that something inside us 'watches us play with the seduction of safety, and the grey promises that sameness whispers, and wonders if you would always live like this'. In the presence of life's mystery, it is wise to be uncertain. 'Sell your cleverness,' counselled Rumi, 'and buy bewilderment.'

The new year is surely a threshold of transition. Fresh from celebrating the mystery of the incarnation, our purified eyes are now open to astonishing possibilities – possibilities fired through pain. In spite of her awful torture and a life that was closing in on her, Sheila Cassidy could write:

And so we must begin to live again, We of the damaged bodies and assaulted minds, Starting from scratch with the rubble of our lives And picking up the dust of dreams once dreamt.

We need courage to shift our perception of things, to transform our consciousness of the mystery that we are. Where do we begin? One suggestion is to recognise that we have a choice about how we see things. One way leads to a more creative, abundant way of living; the other feeds all that is negative within us. 'Every time you make a choice,' wrote C.s. Lewis, 'you are turning the central part of you ... into something ... different from what it was before ... you are slowly turning this central thing ... either into a creature that is in harmony with God and with other creatures ... or else into

one that is in a state of war and hatred with God ... and with itself.' Human thought and creativity have an astonishing power. It is God's imagination, the Christ-imagination, our imagination. They are all expressions of a divine presence. What amazing good news this is, especially at a time of widespread hopelessness. People are lost because they are disconnected from their souls' true spirit. God created us, and became one of us for no other reason than to draw us towards transcendent shores of joy and peace and justice. These shores do not belong to heavenly landscapes. They are the shores on which we live – where terrorists strike, where recession hurts, where churches fail, where families collapse, where fear lives. In the face of the terrible evidence of a fallen humanity, beginnings are still epiphanies of God's faithfulness and of human hope. A beginning is its own truth. It is always a blessing and always timeless. Nor does it need an ending. Beginnings remind us that we are all magnificent possibilities in disguise. We sense their muted insistence. One day, if we are ever to unfold into our God-given destiny, we must listen to this inborn whisper.

(Treasured and Transformed p 75,76)