

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 18th June

Beyond Intimacy

Are you aware of spiritual milestones in your life? Can you recall little personal breakthroughs for you, into the meaning of, for instance, the mysteries of creation and incarnation? Very often these have to do with a sharper focus in our awareness of the presence of God in creation, brought about in any number of ways, such as through reflecting on a poem, a conversation, a baby, or on the writings of the mystics. Or they may have to do with a fresh insight into the wonderful implications of the incarnation, through a good sermon, a good talk, a good time of inner listening, for a deeper grasp of the divine value of all our experiences. Or such moments of growth maybe about a richer understanding arising from a house group discussion, a son leaving home, a daughter getting married, the death of a parent - of the significance of the familiar and routine celebrations of sacraments, of traditional doctrines of the church, or of long forgotten prayers and sets of practices.

Whilst such windows may well spring open for us suddenly and unbidden, nevertheless, the locks and catches will have to be gradually cleaned and oiled, but not always in a deliberate and conscious way. Some kind of quiet energy is usually at work in unrecognised places within us before the small revelations of delight happen. With reference to how children learn, the eminent educationalist Jerome Bruner reminds us that 'discovery, like surprise, favours the prepared mind'. Like the seed that is busy about its business in the womb of the earth during winter; with the coming of spring it rewards our waiting, to keep us wondering and exploring for more beauty tomorrow. Anyway, as I continue with the struggle to prise open the secret of the love and meaning at the centre of all created things, another heart- thought rises up within me. It is about the intimacy of God in the deepest core of our being. . . I want to explore the notion of God's intimacy with us, God's desire to be involved in our lives, God's delight in our acceptance of divine incarnation to a point of total identification. Is it possible that, close and loving as our grasp of God's place in our lives maybe, it is still very incomplete and dualistic? Are we still operating from of a God 'out there' who comes nearer to us at certain times; a God who responds to our invitation to occupy our inmost recesses; a God who, however much we are consumed by longing for communion, is still someone clearly distinct from ourselves and who approaches us from outside? . . .

With humility and reverence, this then is the secret secret I wish to touch.

A few images may help to clarify this 'spiritual milestone' I reach for. When each day I pour some water into the chalice at mass, and watch it become totally and irretrievably lost in the wine, I wonder about God's intimacy with our human nature. Is it possible that God and myself (and all of us) are so at one? Is God's heart, while separate from in one way, yet in another, indistinguishable from my own? Are all prayers that begin with 'Oh God (out there) . . .' still a bit dualistic and separate? Are we calling on a God that we still image as one step removed, One who is somehow over and against humanity, still living somewhere else and coming to us from outside? Is it really possible that my very essence is the essence of God; that God is more me than I am myself?

What other examples and images have we? Take the intimacy of marriage. Intense and complete as this may be, as beautiful and holy as many have experienced, is there still a union that lies beyond - a communion more intimate than the oneness of marriage? And the moment of the Eucharist sharing is the reception into our body-spirit of the sacred species. 'Receive who you are,' the priest used to say when offering the consecrated bread and wine to communicants. This, too, is an ultimate kind of intimacy.

We become, truly and irrefutably, the very body and blood of God. Or maybe the holy communion is the confirmation and guarantee that this is what we already are! How much further can we press the incredible revelation? Can it really be true that in our deepest essence, and from the very beginning, we are inextricably bound up with God? The beauty of our imagination, the breathing of our lungs, the energy of our bodies, the thoughts of our minds, the feeling of our senses, the beating of the heart, the desires of our cells are already the very expression, in time and space, of the Creator God, the Almighty Being, the Tremendous Lover? We say and hear so often that in God 'we live and move and have our being', but, as we well know, it takes a long time to recognise in our hearts what we know and believe with our minds.

All we have to do is surrender to the love that is already within and surrounding us at every point of our truest self.

(Passion for Possible: pages 179-181)