

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 28th May

Born to Be Wild

I reached one of the big O's on my recent birthday. For some reason there was a striking similarity in the themes of the cards I received most of them were urging me into a new phase of rather desperate self-expression and risky escapades. There were pictures of breath-taking bungee jumping, parachuting out of aeroplanes and death-defying goats leaping perilously across yawning chasms. But most of all were motorbikes storming across endless countryside some deserts. Last Easter the Harley-Davidson annual gathering took place in Killarney near where I was born. Instead of avoiding the noisy, crowded town on that weekend, as many had supposed, the local people thronged the streets to see and touch the silver, purring monsters. Parents, grandparents and small children excitedly or wistfully, were visibly stirred by these gleaming machines. I wondered about the source of our innate desire for adventure, for new vistas, for encountering the unknown, for living at the limits. Is there a force within us that needs to be always reaching for what is beyond us, to be for ever compelled to explore? Were all those cards and images but another way of expressing the restless pilgrimage of a graced nature? Were the leaping goats, the opening parachutes, the dream adventures on the favourite route 66 to California - were they all symbols of a God who continually beckons us, from within to new horizons? Is there a compulsion to be free and in all of us?

With the coming of summer my mother, even in her nineties, would recall for us a memory of pure delight from her early teenage years. On the rare occasions when she and my Auntie Nell were released from the drudgery of their work, they would wheel out, not a Harley Davidson but a rusty ramshackle bike. One pedalled, the other hung on for dear life as they bump their way down to North Cork farm road -or bohereen, as they would have called it - both shouting at the top of their voices, ' Be gone, dull care. I give you to the winds.' . . .

During these weeks between Easter and Pentecost we may ask whether the breaking out of the tomb is another image of all our innate longing for freedom? Can the risen Christ be seen as a figure of humanity's relentless desire to transcend mortality? Is the Ascension an endorsement of God's irrepressible energy placed from the beginning in every human heart? Does Pentecost celebrate the imperative to 'go forth' to travel the world with open hearts and minds of light? The compulsion towards 'beyondness', the quest towards liberation, was in Jesus's blood. He was constantly engaged in liberating people from all kinds of restrictions on their freedom, from the things that kept them constricted, from the chains that prevented their flight into another way of being. His utter recklessness in walking into the traps of his enemies, into the garden of his blood, up the hill of his death and into the awful tomb of his darkness and of human sin - all prepared him for the cosmic journey, the final break through that alerts and draws all of us to the margins of our own awesome possibilities.

Easter Ascension and Pentecost inspire, gather and celebrate all the daily breakthroughs in our lives - the brave, prophetic word, the refusal to become a victim, the surrender of egocontrol the telling of the truth, the courage to be. Maybe these Blessed moments in terms of heart and so are in knowing the symbolised in the beckoning images of those birthday cards. When you are committed to this way of living your life you have, as Janet Calvin wrote, 'set sail on another ocean without star of compass, going where the argument leads, shattering the certainties of centuries.' This is a Pentecostal invitation we would often rather ignore.

Yet a free and beckoning God will not leave us alone - a God whose Celtic image was a Wild Goose, a God who stirs in us a passion for another country where everything is different, who urgently urges us to chase the wild dream. To travel, to search, to hope - the Pentecost imperative whispers relentlessly within us.

To be truly human is to be forever pursuing a subtle and elusive dream. Many grow old with the glint of adventure still in their eyes. The girl in WB Yeats' poem may be your lost treasure. She may be your dream companion, your dream accomplishment, your dream horizon. She may be the spirit of your never-ending Ithaca journey, that wild, unfathomable sanctuary deep within your own heart:

*When I am old with wandering through
hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone and kiss
her lips and take her hands;
and walk among long dappled grass,
and pluck till time and times are done,
the silver apples of the moon,
the golden apples of the sun.*

(Unmasking God p46)