

1. Week Beginning Sunday 30th November - Called to be God's Spies

One day the celebrated violinist Yehudi Menuhin was walking down the corridor of a music academy and came across a young Irish student having his lunch. Not recognising the soda bread sandwich, he asked Liam what he was eating. 'Bread, sir,' the wee lad replied. 'Me Ma sent it.'

The great man smiled and was moved to reflect on an Irish mother pouring her love into the dough she was kneading for her beloved son, away from home for the first time. He imagined her baking it, posting it overseas, and homesick Liam slicing it, buttering it - and eating it with great gusto.

Menuhin's imagination was sublimely sacramental and incarnational, yet inspired by something commonplace – bread of life wrapped in brown paper, tied with a piece of string and posted in Connemara! In this very ordinary, everyday moment, the musician recognised the love hidden like yeast in the dough, the bread behind the bread, the horizon behind the horizon, the mystery of the whole world in the body of a baby, the unity of everything in God. Christmas calls us to be God's spies as we penetrate the disguises all around us; to be water-diviners who detect the liquid of life beneath the desert of our days; persistent beachcombers who discover the glimmer of God's gold along the leaden shores of our lives. Without a vibrant sense of the incarnate Presence, the human and divine will drift away from each other, and, as W.B. Yeats warned us, all evidence of Incarnation will be erased from the earth.

In an advent reflection, Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) saint and mystic, reminds us of that same evidence of God in our own bodies too: 'We awaken in Christ's body as Christ awakens our bodies. And everything that is hurt, everything that is shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in him transformed, recognised as whole, as lovely, and radiant in his light.'

The startling news of Christmas is that Christ is not primarily in the heavens, in the scriptures, in the doctrines of the church, not primarily even in the Eucharist itself. For those who believe that our amazing God became common, perishable flesh, Christ is primarily in our own experience, in the ordinariness of our lives and in the silence of our solitude.

(Unmasking God, pp125,126)