

## Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 25th June Careful Hands

"Speak to me of God" I asked the almond tree. And the almond tree blossomed. That is what happens when we let God be God in our lives. God is the one who draws out of us our inner beauty. The spring sun really adds nothing to the trees. It simply makes it safe for them to bud forth what is already waiting within. What is in a germinal state is released into its true essence.

This, I believe, is true also of our human relationships. We are like midwives easing into birth the new wonder in the womb of each other's possibilities and personalities. What a soulsized undertaking every deep friendship is! How quickly such an enterprise exposes the often selfish nature of our commitment to either another person or within a small group! But even in nature it can go wrong. Misreading the signs outside their dark waiting rooms, the eager crocuses, during a fine week in winter, can be tempted to venture out too early into the ambiguous light. So, too, between people. The mutual unfolding, fragile and special, can never be guaranteed. A shadow falls across every truly loving moment. When we wake up the angels in each other's hearts, the demons are aroused as well. When we unlock each other's prisons, we unchain the sinister forces too. In every light that is given the space to shine, the shadows crowd around every edge.

Something negative is never far away every time we draw closer to each other in trust and love. Do I exaggerate when I say that our loving efforts are often stalked and infected by destructive viruses? So what do we do when suspicion and fear, jealousy and envy, possessiveness and doubt, blame and ridicule infect the most delicate part of our reaching out, and trusting, our loving desire for true belonging? What strategies enable us to encounter, transform and harness these significant powers before they poison at their core the lovely but fragile flowers of the heart's garden?

At a recent lectio divina, when I asked these questions, a number of points were made. This is how we saw a way forward. In the first place, there can be little hope for friendship and love to survive without the generosity of old-fashioned forgiveness. The strong one is challenged to overlook, to let go, to be bigger than the one who is, unwittingly perhaps, trying to destroy. The strong one will try to understand where the distressed one is coming from. To know all is to forgive all. We are asked to walk a few miles in each other's shoes before we start to criticise. By the 'strong' one I mean the one who is more open to grace at the time of challenge of conflict, and the roles indeed may change with each new growth point.

Another way forward is for the one who is caught up in some negative reaction, unconsciously assuming some controlling role, to find time and space for a little selfexamination and self-awareness. In so many instances all we are doing in our aggressive and blaming mode is, in psychological terms, a matter of projection. Put very crudely, it means that what we cannot face in ourselves we project onto others. It often emerges that fear and insecurity form the root of such behaviour.

When we search for an explanation for these deep-seated emotions, we may discover that they are connected with some unhealed wounds that are being suppressed, and, more often than not, for a long time. . .

Immense graces emerge when we attend to our inner life and courageously encounter our shadow. The forces of some kind of original sinfulness are part of the essence of our human condition. We ignore such elemental powers at our peril. The rewards for setting out on this journey into our dark places and risking unpleasant discoveries about ourselves are very great. What begins with the taking up of our cross may end with a new experience of resurrection . . .

At this point we are back where we started. We began with the hope that friends will draw out the best in each other, that 'deep calls to deep' and our true beauty is coaxed into the light. Only now we realise that it's not so easy; it takes that bit longer. Even Jesus could not find a short-cut. There is no cheap grace. It takes a clear vision, a vivid dream to sustain us on the mountain: and a certain amount of stubbornness, of a digging in of our heels to survive the distractions, the obstacles and even the aggression that make us doubt, afraid and confused. And this is where the powerful Spirit comes into her own, exploding into life - in her element. Because she is always already there. 'It is in the faithful waiting for the loved one', writes Henry Nouwen, 'that we know how much she has filled our lives already'.

(Passion for the Possible: pp 167, 168, 169)