

## Daniel's reflection for week beginning 25th April EASTER ENERGY

'There is no Catholic God.' But there is the loving energy of Being that sustains all things. Pope Francis said it. There is no 'God out there'. There is the inner spirit of Life that creates and nourishes the body of the cosmos and the cosmos of the human body. Divine grace is the universal instinct for growing, healing, evolving and flourishing. It is the mysterious force that moves the human heart to create, imagine, love and forgive. It is the invisible energy that infuses the physical body with health and well-being. God is one name we have for the completing and fulfilling of our journey from birth, and for the inevitable evolution of everyone and everything into wholeness. 'Speak to us of God' the almond tree was asked. And the almond tree blossomed.

'To love another person is to see the face of God'. This line from *Les Misérables* has touched the hearts of millions. They indicate that all our best human emotions are experiences of intimacy with God, that every time we are moved by something beautiful we are encountering the divine heart. This, among many other breath-taking wonders, is the true meaning of the mystery of the Incarnation. It is why we are now celebrating Easter.

The deepest inter-flow of flourishing between the things of the spirit, of the mind, of the body is as old as the hills of Rome – *mens sana in corpore sano*. As the soul is, so will the body be. Our senses are thresholds of the soul, wrote poet and priest John O'Donohue. Vibrancy, alertness, poise, harmony are all the visible fleshing of the God who loves us, who actually became our heart and mind and lungs and limbs and muscles and bones. These are all sacraments and signs of what God is like, a God whose joy it is to see us fully alive with the abundant life and graced well-being.

The first beneficiary of this beautiful spirituality of life is the recovery of a new sense of vitality, energy and freedom; its first victim is the fear which de-energises our body and corrodes our mind and shrivels our heart. But we are so used to bad religion, one which frightens us instead of enlivening us, which makes us feel guilty or ashamed of our bodies, our sexuality, our sins. It is all meant to have the opposite effect, to still our troubled mind, to bring harmony to our divined soul, to flow over our tense muscles.

Notice the faces of athletes before the race, patients before the operation, people at the point of death. Some have a calmness, a concentration, a trust. Other go to pieces. Some find an inner stillness; some are victims of anxiety and fear. As within, so without. As a priest I daily encounter both attitudes. Mindfulness and meditation, increasing daily in popularity, have an extraordinary power to reduce stress, release energy, relax our bodies, and transform negativity. The bookshelves of a true spirituality are awash with the literature of positive thinking, of a graced way of reflecting, of an interior stillness that has an astonishing power to transform our deadness, our victimhood, our listlessness, into vibrant dance, into the exhilaration of inner health and outer free movement. 'I feel God's pleasure when I run' said *Chariots of Fire* hero Eric Liddell.

That is the time we connect with God. In this scenario, energy springs from intimacy. There is a universal power that inhabits the tiniest insect and the expanding cosmos. Dylan Thomas wrote;

*The force that through the green fuse drives the flower*

*Drives my old age . . .*

*The force that drives the water through the rocks*

*Drives my red blood*

The human body and mind with their wonderful and awesome capacities for creating beauty of all kinds, are the dwelling place of the Christian God. They are the divine work of art, the greatest masterpiece of the greatest artist. Yet bad religion has filled us with a suspicion around the body, a fear of its powers, and has tried everything to give it a bad press and a sinful image. So much awful suffering has been inflicted on beautiful minds and bodies by religions of fear.

Many of us need a truly spiritual re-education so as to respect, befriend and rejoice in our bodies and their marvellous capacities. To be able to travel lightly and joyfully on the journey ahead, no matter what age we may be, with all our energies flowing in balance, with body, mind and spirit dancing in rhythm, we need a new understanding of the miracle, mystery and wonder of our gifted lives. When we begin to believe that the body is in the soul rather than the soul in the body, and when we come alive to our senses and to our skin, and see them as guides and transmitters of energy, health and grace, then our whole lives can be significantly transformed.

The challenge is to glimpse the one-ness of everything. We have not been helped by religion to see how all aspects of life are connected. We have placed huge walls between religion and life, between the soul and the body. But they are one. There is no space anymore between heaven and earth.

There are not, for instance, two kinds of loving – a human kind and a divine kind. There is only one authentic love since God became human love. To love anything or anyone truly is already to love and to be loved by God. To really forgive another is to be forgiven by God. To really see another, to touch or listen to another is the closest we will get to the reality of God. To be excited, thankful, struggling, despairing, imaginative is to be experiencing the real incarnate presence of God.

The people of Ireland have very good reasons for giving up on their faith and church and sacraments. But I strongly feel that they would all benefit so profoundly in their physical health and well-being, as well as in their spirit – and they are all inextricably connected anyway - if the life-giving wholeness of God's grace was truly appreciated by those who serve the Church as leaders.

For many of us Irish Catholics this is almost too much to understand. And if we do understand it a little, then it is almost too much to bear. We are not accustomed to that kind of motherly and unconditional love. We find it hard to believe that we are deeply, extravagantly, non-negotiably loved by a very human God. After centuries of dark and destructive brain-washing we blink helplessly but delightedly in the light of this love. God has forgotten our sins. There is nothing we can do to make God love us any bit more or any bit less. And we are already and always forgiven for everything, no matter what.

How did these fundamental and traditional teachings of the beautiful man Jesus, the Human One, get so dangerously distorted and often destroyed? When were we ever told that God, in the Risen Christ, created us only to enjoy the divine happiness in this life? 'God is sheer joy, and sheer joy demands company,' wrote St Thomas Aquinas. 'God created us to be the manifestation of divine beauty,' wrote Thomas Merton. And this beauty is in our human and healthy form, our sensuality, our creativity, our sexuality. How often are we reassured from the pulpit that we are actually the spitting image of God, fashioned in his likeness, his dream coming true from all eternity, the seed of his being, destined to flower during our lives, not just afterwards in heaven?

How then will Catholics respond to the teaching that it is in our humanity that we are divine, that there is no longer any opposition between the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane? How will they be moved by the revelation that it is by fully entering into our own daily experiences that God is continuously enfleshed for us? There is no line down the middle anymore between two worlds – this evolving planet of human beings and a distant heaven where God dwells.