

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 24th April Easter on the pulse

It was when the evenings were lengthening in the first week of the new millennium that Laura's long lashes began to move again. During those months of waiting, there was a paleness about her, like a sick baby, and her parents' faces became etched forever with pain and fear. It had been a long Good Friday for the Connolly family.

One day Bruce's artistic passion was no longer there. The urge to paint had left him. He looked helpless, without light in his eyes, without fire in his belly. It was a great loss, a deadly emptiness, 'like something torn out of him', he said. For most of a year we waited. The autumn turned to winter. Then, around this time last year, at a Vigil Mass, I noticed, when he came to receive Holy Communion, a small, shy smile on his face. It was all we needed to know. For Bruce, Spring had come.

It was to reveal the grace in such moments that Jesus died. It was to identify the hands of a healing God in those small resurrections that Jesus was raised from the tomb. Whenever we weep tears of relief, gasp at the endurance of someone's commitment to duty, wonder at the power in one word or look of love, then we are coming down from the cross of defeat. Whenever we keep going in spite of the deadly, daily routine of trivial chores, fight the despair that lurks in our breasts, refuse to become embittered when betrayed, then we are living out, in space and time, the hard-won fruits of our Saviour's passion.

If resurrection does not impinge and impact on the nitty-gritty moments of our days and nights, then, whatever else it may be, it is not real for us. It does not, to be sure, deliver us from the brokenness of being human, but it does put us back together again. The continual miracle is to be discovered precisely within the ordinary, relentless repetitions of each week, sometimes unobtrusively, sometimes with a shock. A father holds his fearful son as he momentarily turns back, in panic, just before stepping on to the rugby pitch for his first match, against lads twice his size. "Don't be afraid," he says, "We know you can do it." A woman holds her trembling man in the middle of the night and whispers, "Shh, love; it will soon be light."

If these words are not God's words, twice divine by virtue of nature and grace, of birth and baptism, then where do we look for the meaning of being saved and redeemed? Or is there another world somewhere, where Easter happens, but not in a way that can be 'proved upon the pulses', as the young poet Keats asked before he died at 25? When that father, and that lover, spoke their words of hope to the beloved of their hearts, they were doing exactly what Jesus did, no more, no less, whenever he uttered those self-same words of ultimate salvation before and after his final, paschal breakthrough. What was revealed at Easter is that every human act of love is a divine act of love: that every human whisper of trust echoes around the halls of heaven; that God too, looks excitedly through our eyes, whenever we look at anybody or anything with wonder and delight.

The essence of Easter is that it changes everything. A new reality has entered into our consciousness. Nothing, anymore, is irrevocable. The impossible has become possible. No door is forever closed. Betrayal, loss of innocence and despair do not have the last word. Because now, the many graves and prisons we live in, can be regarded as the very source of an amazing freedom – transforming our lives into new levels of light and being. There is a breathtaking moment when we begin to realize that the past does not matter anymore, that a totally new page can be turned over every morning for us to write on. But to turn that new page we must often reach beyond the limits of possibility, into the depths of our soul.

In fairly recent Western art, the Easter mystery is often depicted in pictures of the rising Christ carefully and confidently stepping out of some kind of coffin or tomb. It is all very deliberate and controlled. The Eastern Orthodox

traditions reveal another story. The 'harrowing of hell' is a theme in their mosaics and frescoes. In them our Saviour is portrayed as bursting out of the fires of damnation in the most dramatic and amazing way. Clutching Adam and Eve (the human race) under each arm, he thunders through the gates of Hades, from the inside out.

He is not painted as stretching to reach them, or drawing them up, or sending down a ladder. No, he vanished into the red-hot heart of hell, the place where the burning is most intense, those aching places in all our lives where pain runs rampant. With a fierce look in his eyes, his face blazing with intense desperation, he bursts out of the jaws of death, grasping close his precious bundles, with chains and locks and prison bars flying off in all directions. That's the total intensity we're in danger of losing. That's the cost of discipleship. Easter is not for the faint-hearted.

What's important to remember is that such effort, such total commitment is continued in the unpredictable hours of our own days, in the violence of our passions, in the power of our compulsions, in the relentless urges of the mystery of our being. The civil war in the soul of Jesus is waged all over again in the wild and wayward emotions that suddenly rise from deep within us and, like a tsunami wave, sweep across the islands of our unprepared hearts. They strike us, without warning, in the stirrings and yearnings that come to us, with a devastating clarity, during the course of a normal day. They steal up on us at night when we dream, for no apparent reason, about people we have loved, feared, longed for, neglected or hated, bringing aching realities back to life, leaving us very unready for the coming day.

The intense Good Friday of love and fear, of hope and despair, is again lived through, whenever we try to hold the space between faithfulness and betrayal, telling the truth and telling lies. Holding that ambiguous space is a holy art. On the cross, with outstretched arms, Jesus did it. On the one hand, his doubt, despair, a cursing thief and the absence of his father. On the other hand, his faith, his hope, a blessing thief and the presence of his mother. And already, within this night of contradiction, within this threshold of anguished waiting, the light was gathering itself to dance, in the morning, on the mountains. The seeds of the one were already taking root in the soil of the other. As we can gather from John's Gospel, the whole three traumatic days of Holy Week were, for Jesus, experienced in one timeless moment.

It is the same with us. For God is always true to the essence of Incarnation. Whether gently or dramatically, it is only to the extent that we have sensed the presence of a redeeming Easter 'on the pulse' of the wounds of our mortality, that we can ever claim heaven. Maybe resurrection, as our ultimate future, will be the surprised realisation that we have been experiencing it, at least in part, all our lives. We will know well when we're home! "Heaven," wrote Harry Williams in *True Resurrection*, "will be recognized as a country we have already entered, and in whose light and warmth we have already lived."