

## Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 7th April –

### Easter is about bodies, personal and cosmic

My spondylosis was flaring up again, and needed attention. The surgery waiting-room was hot and crowded. A child with some kind of painful rash was becoming alarmingly upset. We were all looking at her and at the flustered mother, already holding a baby in her lap. She pleaded with, explained to, and scolded the suffering, obstreperous little girl to no avail. We were all becoming uncomfortable and uneasy. Clearly embarrassed the mother handed her baby to the concerned woman next to her and reached for her inconsolable child. She lifted her high, and held her firmly against her breast. We all waited. After a few seconds a sweet silence descended on the room.

Easter, I think, is a bit like that. It reminds us that God reaches us in human touch. It is in our physical, earthy humanity that we heal and save each other. We have learned this from a human God. John placed his ear on the heart of Jesus at the Last Supper. Mary Magdalene touched his feet, Thomas his wounds. Tertullian, a very early Church Father, in an untranslatable play on words, put it all very succinctly when he said, *caro cardo salutis* - it is in the flesh that salvation hinges.

And the mystery has a relevance beyond human beings alone. Since God became human in Jesus, a becoming that exploded forth at Easter, we are called to believe that not only the human condition but the earth itself from which it springs, are the real presence of God's own essence. At his poetic best, John Paul II repeatedly and delightedly kept reminding us of this 'cosmic' picture.

From the beginning we have been too slow to believe the astonishing reality of Incarnation. The power, presence and promise of God are now available and accessible in the form and expression of our humanity, within its dreams, relationships, emotions and all its experiences. They are also inextricably intertwined with the fabric and core of the world itself. We forever struggle with the challenging truth that in the fleshing of the Word, and in the raising of that same Word, God discarded divine immunity, emptied the Godhead of all its glory. For all time, God wished to be known as the Human One with the five senses, the Son of Man, who is now delighted to be confined, unprotected, within the constraints of the finite realities of a beloved world.

Like the Incarnation itself, Easter too is about bodies, personal and cosmic. The true orthodoxy of Catholic Christianity has never deviated from this teaching. What is to be avoided is a view that sees Jesus taking a solo flight back to the shores of heaven on that Paschal morning. There is no sacramentality in such a mis-understanding. Neither is it only a question of a personal salvation for our individual souls after death. The truth of Resurrection, what is revealed at Easter, is that in our present, frail and redeemed bodies we carry the saving power of God. The risen Christ is the eternal sacrament of a risen humanity and a risen world.

When we pay attention we notice this incarnate, compassionate presence all around us. Even as I write these very words a neighbour, on the way back from the surgery, called in for a chat. She happened to mention that our local doctor, a Hindu, had, with his wife, decided to sell their belongings here so as to work in a small African village later this year. They plan to stay there for the rest of their lives. Having worked in the village last summer, they had, they said, no choice. God has no favourites!

Ahead of us lies Holy Week. Emphasised throughout its days is the persistent reality of the full humanity of God. The movement from death to life, from darkness to light, identifiable in every phase of the liturgy, is remembered in flesh, tears, blood – all the emotions of a very human being. And by virtue of our solidarity with the Saviour, everyone and everything is redeemed and completed, and, from the inside out, the world itself is renewed and restored.

(Extract from longer article for the *Furrow* magazine)