

4. Kitchen God

My brother Joseph had Down's Syndrome. Every so often, in my dreams, he still comes storming back to deeply disturb my life. My mother adored him. And during those most difficult times, especially when Joseph's severe diabetes demanded unrelenting attention, she was sustained by the certainty that in caring for Joseph she was entertaining angels unaware. If I had my mother back now I would tell her that it was even more than that. It was the Lord himself who was there.

The same is true for every member of every family. Even in these postmodern times, when the notion of 'family' is undergoing radical change, it is still true. The mystics believed that God is born anew in every child that graces our planet. 'Here comes God again,' they would say, 'in deep disguise. The seed of God becomes God. Just as the pear seed becomes the pear tree, and the hazel seed becomes the hazel tree, so too, God's seed in us becomes God.'

And all of this happens in the living-rooms and kitchens of every family. The home is, indeed, a holy place. It is the nursery of divinity. And, as with our Joseph, and all those who are different, it can be a long nursery with no graduation day. As midwives of mystery, the work of many parents is unrelenting. Their whole lives are spent in persuading and coaxing, with the mother-tongue, God's incarnate, unfamiliar beauty from within reluctant shadows, into the light of day.

When parents are gathered on Judgement Day, the Lord will gently say: 'I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink, naked and you clothed me, homeless and you sheltered me, imprisoned and you visited me. Come; enter the kingdom I have prepared for you.' And the parents will be bewildered and ask: "Are you sure, Lord? When did we see you hungry and feed you?"

The Lord will reply, "Do you really not know? Do you not remember the way you carefully fed me when I was a baby; the way you loved me into my first small steps across the kitchen into your arms, and later, my bigger steps into the waiting world. All the time, that was me you were nourishing. Yes, of course it was your child. But it was me, your God, as well."

"When were you thirsty, Lord?" they asked. "I needed your love and comfort.. You held me to your breast and I could hear your heart. As tenderly as the sun opens the daisies in the morning, your gentle voice and loving eyes opened my soul to the mystery of my true identity. I, your God, became your vulnerable child so as to experience your great tenderness to me"

"But naked, Lord? And homeless?" The Lord replied, "I was born naked and homeless, and you sheltered me, first in your womb and then in your arms. In my rebellious years I left home, blinded by lesser lights and loves. You did not judge me; your great heart never doubted me; you forgave me, you believed in me, you drew me into a higher way of life-making, light-making and love-making. No matter what, on my return home, your face at the door was always a smiling sacrament of welcome.'

"But imprisoned, Lord? Surely not!" The Lord paused. "There are many kinds of prison. When I was imprisoned in my fears I cried out in the night; you came and lifted me from behind the bars of my cot and folded me in your arms. Years later you lifted me from behind the bars of bigger fears – fears of my own inadequacy, fears of my own intense emotions; fears of the terror and beauty of the unknown life ahead."

Perhaps nowhere more than in the heartfelt dynamic of married life, where the human spirit stretches itself, in its trusting and letting go, to the limits of its potential, is this expression of incarnate love more clearly sacramentalised. We discover, to our astonishment, that every ordinary human home is the unexpected place where God dwells, whether this be recognised or not. Even where there is suspicion and deceit, married life must remain an epiphany of mystery; a participation in God's own challenging essence. Anytime we say 'I'm trying to forgive you' or 'I still believe in you' to each other, that is also the ever-present expression of God's incarnate covenant within us, constantly healing and completing all that is imperfect.