

5. Home is a Holy Place

Holy Week teaches us that we can only experience the Risen Christ when we have undergone some kind of loss, fear or disillusionment. Most of these 'little deaths', and the more awful ones, too, are found within the world of the home. Because of its potential for creating immense joy, family life can also be a den of destruction. Where is the divine heart in the way we crush the life out of each other behind closed doors? And yet, is not the very hopelessness of our lives the only place for hope to happen? Where else, if not in this loveless noise, and against all the odds, can the faint music of Easter be recognised deep within us? If we do not struggle to believe this, what is the alternative, to whom shall we go?

There is an urgent energy within our domestic world waiting to be released into the Church. The home is a cauldron of emotions, all now charged with redemptive presence; for that reason it is also a powerhouse of renewal within the Church. The passions and prayers, the storms and whispers, the blame and the blessing – are all part of that graced energy. Everything that happens in the unbelievably complex fabric of family life, the light and the dark of it, has God's life-giving heartbeat within it, God's loving signature set to it. And we go to Mass to remember and to celebrate together the extraordinary revelation that no moment is 'merely' human or worldly, but rather a place of grace; every threshold a door to heaven.

With this vital 'secret' in mind, we insisted, at some cost, in designing a welcoming living-room into the foyer of the lovely new Church we built a few years ago. In this hearth, people sit around the open fire, tell stories, read poetry, or chat and drink coffee. And each day, too, the same sacramental space is used for celebrating the Eucharist; nature and grace again embrace on the one small kitchen-table of life. We placed these words on the mantelpiece so as to always remember:

'Smiling broadly with great delight Jesus, our only true host, sets a place for absolutely everyone at this table. He embraces every family, each with its own stories to tell him – the hurting and the healing, the sinning and the gracing. He then sits down himself and explains to us, amazed, how those ordinary moments of raw human life are his life too. His eyes are twinkling as we struggle to understand what he is telling us. Deeply comforted, we eat and drink his words with the bread and wine of joy. He kisses each one of us before we leave. Our hearts are burning within us as we recall his parting words of comfort - our kitchens, too, are little Bethlehems, our breakfast tables are small altars, our whole lives, with their calvaries and resurrections, are one long consecration and communion. But now we are so slow to leave him. "Don't be sad,' he says, 'I'll be waiting for you at home.'"