

*In 'New Hearts for New Models', Daniel uses images to help us understand the kind of priestly service needed in our time. Each of us is called, through baptism, to be priest, prophet and servant-king to one another. Although written primarily for priests, hopefully these images will help us all.*

## **Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 7th March Priest as 'Farmer of Dreams'**

The priest farms the Field of Dreams. He divines that underground spring, the secret spark in every heart. He knows that behind the veneer of our eternal lives, the external is at work. Within us there is a secret immensity that we seldom even glimpse. In its subtle wisdom, the eternal artist carefully designs a unique destiny for each person. 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.' To be born is to be chosen. That is a task that can only be accomplished by each particular heart. And this task of grounding, focusing and nourishing the creative longing of the divine within everyone, is priestly work.

To testify to all of this is the calling of the priest. To witness to the holiness of all life is his vocation. The counter attraction is not between the church and the world; it is between authentic and inauthentic ways of being human. Jesus, the church, the sacraments, the priest, are all there, not to draw people out of a neutral or even threatening world into a safer, sacred institution, but to enable people, and all creation, to become aware of their inherent holiness and divine destiny. This growing awareness will change all our lives deeply. It will reveal the ignorance, blindness, greed, self-hatred and self-imposed limits that feed the alienation and dis-ease around us and within us, in an individualistic and consumeristic society. The priest's work, in the fields of life, in and out of season, is to reap a different harvest . . .

The farmer knows something about the discipline of waiting, about the stature of trusting, about the perennial interplay of light and darkness, about the mystery of death and life. He knows that only if the seed in the ground first dies, will there be a rich harvest; that the fresh and green new shoots can only grow from their winter-womb. It is for good reasons that St. Paul draws on the hard reality of the farm and the farmer for images about the nature of working towards the reign of God in our midst. George Herbert's serene and unwavering trust in the seasons of salvation and in the redemptive power of God is beautifully expressed here:

*Who would have thought my shrivelled heart  
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone  
Quite underground; as flowers depart  
To see their mother-root, when they have  
blown;  
Where they together  
All the hard weather,  
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.*

As farmer of hearts the priest is no stranger to the subtle influence of sin, as well as to the stronger influence of divine grace. This, he will be aware of in the first place, as he watches his own fields the spiritual seasons of life pass over his own soul. Like the farmer, he will know that there is no 'instant harvest', that no one can 'force the river'. In the farm of hearts, there is no shortcut to happiness, no cheap grace to salvation.

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But we are still trying to redraw the maps of our lives, without the jungles of confusion, to reroute the traffic of our rushing hearts, so as to avoid the rush-hour of painful encounter, to reset the compasses of our souls, creating diversions around the deserts of empty and arid places. If only we knew that in so doing, we are resisting the disguised highway to our deepest wishes. Scott Peck reminds us that most of our neuroses arise from the avoidance of necessary pain. Ernest Hemingway observes that while life breaks all of us, some people grow at the broken places. It is not the experience of hurt and hate and envy that destroy us, but the refusal to acknowledge them, to accept them, to encounter and dismantle them.

St Paul writes about taking care of the hidden self, about setting it free by bringing the suppressed emotions to the surface, about realising that what we thought was dead and buried was, in fact, only buried, but not dead. All of our buried emotions are buried alive. And how we resist the call to come out into the light! How strong the attraction of darkness! What fascination we carry for the destructive forces that are rampant in our deepest centre!