

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 13th June - The holiness of falling in love

'St Francis invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants to us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. Beyond the language of mathematics and biology he takes us to the heart of what it is to be human ... just as happens when we fall in love with someone ...

[Laudate Si 12]'

It is more than information, the Pope is saying regarding St Francis' teaching, it is beyond head-knowledge – rather a delighted grasping by the heart. The reality of being in love with nature lies at the very heart of an ecological spirituality. Love inspires us and impels us to take action. Guilt is a poor motivator for improving our behaviour. In his universally acclaimed *The Universe is a Green Dragon* physicist Brian Swimme reminds us that it is by attraction, not by fear, that the human heart is unlocked. It is by allurements, that all-pervasive unconscious desire for oneness, that the whole of creation is drawn, driven and sustained.

'Beyond the language of mathematics and biology ...', the Pope writes, referring, in part, to the sacramental language of poetry and the arts. This language opens our hearts with their play and their pain, their courage and their fear, their delight in life and their unending loneliness. In the 19th century Matthew Arnold wrote in his essay 'The Study of Poetry', *'More and more, humanity will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.'* Traditionally, western Christian theology has been predominantly concerned with the understanding of God through conceptual and rational terms. These are, of course, vital in our attempts to intellectually grasp the mystery better, but a purely prose-based theology is an impoverished one.

Theology is about the human heart as well as the human mind. Deep within us, we humans have an intuitive sense of the Creator God, and this sense is usually expressed more clearly and experienced more fully through the arts and other non-verbal modes of creative imagination. All true artists strive to capture that which is at the core of humanity, be it called truth, goodness, beauty or life's meaning. A genuine work of art – poem, film, dance, music – has the power to evoke in people feelings of awareness of the Holy that are innate in everyone. At this precise moment we are lifted out of ourselves, time seems to stand still and we seem to be at one with everything. In this non-rational instant of knowing, our normal intellectual efforts, essential as they are, are transcended.

Pope Francis knows this. That is why he draws analogies and metaphors for the actual experience of God's presence from the world's best artists, past and present. His *Laudato Si'* is a clear example of that. To earth this heavenly awareness within us, he even reaches for the very common, but uniquely moving human experience when he writes *'just as happens when we fall in love with someone.'* (LS 11) Like art, the power of this particular moment conveys something of divine presence, and its beauty is seen as a felt reflection of the ultimate beauty we call God.

Art and 'being in love' have the ability to expose the truth behind and within 'the ordinary'; they create the doorway to a religious experience, a heightened awareness of God's incarnate presence in the world. Pope

St John Paul II states in his Letter to Artists (1999) that *'every genuine art form in its own way is a path to the inmost reality of humanity and the world. This reality is God. The world we live in needs such beauty to keep despair at bay ... It is beauty, like truth, which makes the invisible world palpable, and brings joy to the human heart.'* It takes us beyond who and where we are. Without stimulating our faith-imagination this healing breakthrough will be a bridge too far.

It is for this reason that Pope Francis reminds us of his namesake's passion for revealing the message of Incarnation to all he met. *'Beyond the language of mathematics and biology'*, St Francis invites us *'to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants to us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.'*(LS 11) Unlike so many who have gone before him, our Pope reaches for every possible teaching aid when it comes to revealing something of God. Whether it be the cycle of nature, the breathless moment of a sudden wonder, the extraordinary creations of artists in every medium and from any religion, he sees them as sacraments of disclosure, as precious vessels of grace. We are called to become aware of our normal and often shallow process of 'looking at' something rather than 'seeing into' it; of framing and pre-judging things as 'merely' secular or 'merely' human rather than allowing the surprise of our catching the deeper, unframed glimpse. Thus does the invisible become visible as we try daily to make the limitless Incarnation the measure of our understanding, our seeing and our very being.

Do we need to rediscover and embrace our graced imagination, to reawaken and nourish it, so as to make headway and heart-way in these new, alluring, often confusing but always rewarding insights about the links between Creation, Incarnation and evolution?

(An Astonishing Secret p 52)