

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 10th March –

INTIMACY AND BIGNESS

Is our faith still stuck with an image of God that focuses on a sense of obedience/right and wrong? Or can we be open enough to imagine our faith as warm love-affair with God? One life-giving practice these special Lenten days of grace *is to ask about our daily relationship* with God. I dare to offer a few suggestions concerning God's love for us and our own capacity of heart and soul. We have within us our own 'spiritual director', that inner voice that is more powerful than we think – our imagination, our power, our inner authority. Only when we are convinced of how loved we are – of our preciousness to God, will we truly trust that voice. Let us begin by practising daily intimacy, recognising that we are already living in the divine presence, learning to see all things as God's presence.

Pope Francis speaks of bigness, magnanimity¹, that we all have within us - a desire for wholeness, for unity, for intimacy, for being part of something, somebody bigger, greater than us. 'Capax mundi; capax Dei'. Our hearts are restless until they rest in God. We long for completion – in love, in acceptance, in belonging. Our lives are always changing, reaching, growing but we have to risk saying yes. Everything you need is already there, waiting to blossom.

Picture this image: - *A field of flowing brown furrowed land just greening with a new sheen of barley. The seaweed on the seashore beginning to green itself in its element, the water. This is the bigger picture of ourselves when we surrender to the love-energy of God's deep spirit: saying yes to the energy and grace already within you, waiting to flood your soul – but you must really trust.*

The soul defines itself by expansion and inclusion, not by saying 'no' but by a courageous 'yes'. Breaking through your barriers and boundaries is always risky, fear-filled, and we resist it. We are afraid of being changed. The ego resists the risk in any real change. Why go on a dangerous journey when I have a secure and familiar place to stay safe in? So many of us were brought up to take no risks, to always play it safe, live by certainty.

But here, we are brave and ready for these few weeks of Lenten adventure. We are already on the path, already being transformed and converted to searching. Please remember that. All you seek is already within you – what is needed is the reminder, the support and encouragement, the push to keep you travelling on that path. The Persian poet Rumi reminds us –

'Get up early,

Do not go back to sleep,

The breezes at dawn have secrets to tell you

Don't go back to sleep!

You must ask for what you really want.'

Do not go back to a routine religion of regulations and rubrics; to a God who is too small for you and an often flawed religious teaching that blocks the light from your face.

*How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself living a deep and happy life? It takes perseverance, passion to surrender to God's ways. Too often we lose heart but these days of Lent can be an opportunity for *a radical change, a new vision, a paradigm shift in your awareness about God and the world and yourself*. Don't try too hard – let it happen: make space for grace to happen. In fact we are meant to relax as deeply as possible these days, to notice things, to let

nature talk to us, to taste the food at meals in ways we have not before, to listen to music, to look at people's faces, to look at your own in the mirror, to reflect, without anxiety, on how your life is going, and on how you would like it to unfold from now on. Look at your life and ask yourself do you settle for it so far. Or do you seek a new version of you! **START LIVING THE NEW LIFE NOW!**

Finding your own heart and soul is about realising how big they are. Your heart is as big as the heart of Jesus – remember Pope Francis' love of magnanimity. Try practising your creativity; try something new each day! Notice the fear -open yourself to courage! There is a great joy in courage. Find a new freedom in your days. 'I can do all things in him who makes me strong.' Try writing a poem each morning - before breakfast? You don't have to be Seamus Heaney! Lower your standards!

To travel this path there is always the need for silence, commitment, a passion for change, a belief in the Holy Spirit working within you, the possibility of a new you, a made-over, mentally-detoxed you, of a more abundant life for the rest of your life. May the rest of your life be the best of your life!

And yes, there is the necessary dying if we are ever to grow 'In the middle of my winter, there is an invincible spring.' We all know vulnerability. Ronald Rolheiser says: *'To be vulnerable in the true sense does not mean that someone must become a doormat, a weakling, devoid of all pride, going out of her way to let others know all her faults and weaknesses. To be vulnerable is to be strong enough to be able to present ourselves without cover-ups or pretence, without masks, without an artificial display of our credentials. In brief, to be vulnerable is to be strong enough to be honest and tender.'* Fear can make us smaller; it can narrow our vision; it can block the bigger picture. But our vulnerability before God and others can make us stronger – I can do all things in Him who makes me strong. Remember those long greening furrows of brown, raked earth: that shrivelled bit of seaweed set free. Vulnerability – acceptance, humility - stops us being judgemental (when you know yourself) - makes us sensitive to the pain of others. Without vulnerability and pain we would never grow.

This first week of Lent think or write of the moments in your life when you changed deeply.

¹Magnanimity: this virtue of the great and the small (Non coarctari maximo contineri minimo, divinum est), which always makes us look at the horizon. What does being magnanimous mean? It means having a great heart, having greatness of mind; it means having great ideals, the wish to do great things to respond to what God asks of us. Hence also, for this very reason, to do well the routine things of every day and all the daily actions, tasks, meetings with people; doing the little everyday things with a great heart open to God and to others. (Pope Francis' address to Jesuits in Italy and Albania, June 2013).

(Adapted from Daniel's notes written for a Lenten retreat at Dromantine)