

Daniel's reflection for week beginning February 5th – Jacket or Strait-jacket? Many of us never find our true shape

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When it comes to buying a suit, I'm an off-the-peg kind of customer. I'm neither a big man nor a small man – I'm somewhere in the middle. I was recently trying on a suit-jacket, in a local store. I was feeling pressurised by the sales assistant to purchase a suit that I did not feel comfortable in – something that wasn't really 'me'. I resisted the pressure and decided to wait for another day – and another store! As I left the store a story came to mind. It's about how we often live our lives to suit other people. A young man came to collect a suit his tailor had made for him. When he tried it on he noticed one side was longer than the other. When he pointed this out to the tailor he was told his suit would be perfect if he held one shoulder higher than the other. The young man also noticed that one leg of the trousers was too long. When he pointed this out, the tailor told him that the suits would look great if he held his arm at an angle and if he walked with a limp. The tailor was so persuasive that the young man decided to wear the new suit on his way home, confident it would create the impression he wanted to create. As he was walking through the park, two old men sitting on a bench noticed him. One of them commented with sympathy on how crippled the young man was, but the other said, 'Ah yes, but what a suit!' We often twist ourselves out of shape just to conform to the demands of fashion, of looking good, of being 'cool' and 'with it' More seriously, perhaps, we also twist our lives out of shape so as to be accepted by others, to meet their expectations, to make a good impression. So much of our energy goes into the externals of each day and to the superficial aspects of living.

We miss the deeper dimensions of the gift of our lives. Our hearts and souls often remain dangerously undernourished. We are so busy living on the surface of things that we forget about the more abundant life deeper down – that place where so much of our potential, so many of our gifts and powers remain untouched.

Do you remember the film Shirley Valentine? Shirley grows increasingly aware of how confined her life has become. She has allowed herself to become a slave of the expectations of others and, as a result, she has left much of her dream unrealised. 'I've led such a little life,' she said, 'and even that will be over pretty soon. I've allowed myself to lead this little life when inside me there is so much more and it's all gone unused. And now it will never be.'

May all of us truly live our lives and dreams at the deepest levels.

(Prism of Love pp63,64)