

Week beginning 28th June – Listen to your inner child

There is, within each of us, a wonderful child of wonder whose original vision is, unknowingly, our guiding light, not only in this world but, amazingly, in the next as well. You may not be familiar with the imagery and language about the inner child, a contemporary spiritual/psychological approach to healing and wholeness. The hurt and damaged child of our childhood needs to be picked up and nurtured at some time during the decades of our lives. Usually it is only when something traumatic happens that the adult will perceive the need to look within, and begin a new and nourishing relationship with the small but powerful presence we call your 'child'.

It is about listening to the voice of our divine child whose eternal heart is the continual link between the birth, death and after-life of our bodies and souls. By this I mean that the small baby carries fresh echoes of God within its tiny heart, and these are nearly always lost or stolen in the course of the span of our years on earth. This reflection is about the eternal importance of recovering an intimacy with that child because she is the unique doorway to our intimacy with God, and she is also that part of us which will live on forever in heaven. . . 'Unless you become as little children,' Jesus insists, 'you cannot enter the kingdom of God.' There is an eternal quality about childhood. Childhood is not lived through, and then shed, like a skin or cradle that has served its purpose. . . . We do not lose childhood. Rather, at some point in our lives, and maybe for you that time is now, we rediscover that wounded and usually neglected child; we name it and greet it; we honour and affirm it; we ask its forgiveness. I repeat; it is our child, our very essence, who will lead us to the abundant life promised by Jesus, not just in this life but into heaven too. . .

The child within will reward us well for the time we take to understand and then to listen. Far from being a new-fangled notion, it is part of the wisdom of the earth; it is at the centre of our Christian worship. The baby at baptism is called the temple of the Holy Spirit, a priestess and a princess. One of our best theologians, Karl Rahner, puts it this way:

'. . . we only become the children we were because we gather up time – and in this, our childhood too – into our eternity . . . we do not move away from childhood in any definitive sense, but rather move towards the eternity of this childhood, to its definite and enduring validity in God's sight . . . it is important in itself also, as a stage of man's personal history in which that takes place that can only take place in childhood itself, a field which bears fair flowers and ripe fruits such as can grow in this field and no other, and which themselves be carried into the storehouses of eternity.'

I'm always moved when I read these words. They are among the most beautiful I know. Please reread them because their meaning is not immediately obvious. They are such a splendid celebration of the uniqueness of childhood. (Travelling Light pp123,124)

Follow-up - If you would like to explore mindful meditation, try this simple daily praxis:

Today's prayer time seems like a good occasion to recognise the presence of the wounded and graced child within you. You will need all your angels around you and peace in your heart, a relaxed body and a quiet mind. There is a seriously damaged part of you that yearns for health and wholeness. Speak, today, to this damaged little creature. Give her a name – maybe the pet name your family had for you when you were a child. There is no need to be embarrassed or self-conscious when doing this . . . You are addressing your most intimate self. Find a photograph of yourself when you were about seven or eight. Put it in a prominent place in your room. Address it. You don't have to say everything at once – maybe an initial acknowledgement of the presence of your neglected child, together with an apology for that neglect. Today's grace, for you, is about beginning a healing conversation of immense transforming power. Please remember that deep and turbulent emotions are often released during this encounter. In a spirit of humility, self-forgiveness and discovery, draw your meditation to a close. (Travelling Light p126)