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Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 12th May –

Looking, Seeing, Recognising

The Lord invited others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world, because he himself was in constant touch with nature lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things ... [Laudato Si 97]

These are wonderful and revealing words by our Pope. They provide us with a picture of Jesus sauntering along the morning roads of Palestine, attentive to everything going on around him, greeting the people, listening to the birds, watching the clouds, pausing by a river, asking questions, touching a leaf and in doing so praising his beloved Father. These words and images are the heartbeat of Incarnation – the very love and meaning at the Christian core. There is a pure beauty folded in to the features of our world, a divine presence in every presence, God's burning heart warming every human heart. Far from being the place of our exile, this Earth is God's home and therefore ours. The Pope calls us to renew our minds in Christ. And our theology too. There is a new story, a rediscovered understanding of who we are, of Creation, evolution, Incarnation, of God. An astonishing love story is being revealed. Blessed are they who can perceive eternity in every passing minute, who can experience something of God in every vicissitude of life.

The Pope is telling us about a new way of looking, a new way of seeing, a new way of being. This is what Incarnation has revealed – 'Behold; I make all things new!' Jesus asked us to 'Lift up your eyes and see the fields ...' (Jn 4: 35). Many people are learning how to sit and gaze at the scene before them – the rivers and hills, the soil they walk on and the heavens above them, the weeds at their feet and the distant horizon, the setting sun and the rising moon, winter's withering and spring's awakening, the rainbow's arch of peace over the frantic morning rush hour, the starry sky over silent city streets. Their attentive gaze is full of 'fondness and wonder'. They look at, then they see, recognise, experience and adore these ordinary epiphanies of divinity.

The Pope is asking us to notice the 'divine message in everything'; to ask ourselves what lies hidden in these daily sights and sounds. What might these moments have to say to you at the deepest levels about your struggles with your life just now, about the quality of your relationships and emotions, about how you see God, about your restlessness, your courage, your pain, your hopes? Jesus asks us to look again at the sparrows, the lilies, the fields. The seeds of beauty are scattered everywhere. But we have to be aware, alert, alive, to be open, to be willing, to be ready. The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed, like yeast in the flour, like treasure hidden in the field, like a merchant in search of fine pearls, like a dragnet cast into the sea (Mt 13: 31). Real beauty is not showy. Only those with eyes to see will pause long enough to be astonished . . .

There is a sacramental moment I remember well. It was a dark, eerie Friday afternoon at the end of March 1970, outside our parish nursery school overlooking the (then) foggy, murky city of Sheffield. The children were streaming to freedom towards the waiting bus. Suddenly a small girl noticed the magnificent rainbow. There it was, a bow of beauty, elegant as a leaping ballet dancer, stretching gracefully across the bloodshot sky of our industrial city. Her companions gathered around her. Fine-tuned as they were to the play of light and shade, to the dance of colours from their Lenten class preparation for the imminent celebration of the Feast of Brightness, their young eyes missed nothing in that curved miracle of wonder that hung like a silent crescent of blessing over their homes and hearts, almost within reach of their small hands. Their teacher quietly joined them. Would she talk about God, about Easter, about giving thanks? She didn't. The still wonder of the children, their awed silence, this timeless moment was pure worship. As the Pope indicated, true beauty needs no explaining.

(An Astonishing Secret)