

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 5th May –

Moments that Touch Eternity

'The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good.' [Pope Francis Laudato Si 84]

You feel the Pope is enjoying reflecting on special sacramental moments of his life, both past and present. He dwells on the sacredness of all things, things that are sacred just by being themselves – animals, plants, insects, deserts, oceans, skies, planets, fleas. As well as human beings, who are created in God's image, every creature has its own purpose. Nothing is superfluous. God's extravagant love is inscribed into everything. There is something deeply touching in the evocative words and phrases he uses in this section: 'Soil, water, mountains – all that exists is a caress of God'. That is why, he writes, 'anyone who has grown up in the hills and fields, or who used to sit by the well to drink, or played outdoors in the streets or the neighbourhood square – going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves'. When you have the time, try to recapture some of those places and moments when you felt, and still feel close to nature, when you sense a 'oneness', a connection with everything, with our common being. These special times of disclosure, of spiritual 'peak moments', of maybe fleeting and timeless experiences of 'otherness', of the numinous, are sacramental glimpses of our ineffably beautiful Mother-Creator – they last for ever because they touch eternity.

At home in the South-West of Ireland we lived in the shadow of the 'Two Paps Mountains' (Dhá Chioch Danann), faithful companions during the seasons and decades of the lives of our family. Named in honour of the goddess Danu, they reminded us of those who went before us – the pagans, the Celts, the Christians – and of our common lineage and evolving understanding of God. It was at the request of the local people that I celebrated the Eucharist on the Paps one spring morning. The magic mist (ceo draíochta) of folklore parted and, with the inner, mystical eye of our faith, we sensed the bright presence of a mystery beyond us. It was a sacramental moment if ever there was one. Away to the west of us the Atlantic Ocean sang of God's vastness; to the east, the Golden Vale of Munster reflected God's extravagant bounty. High overhead, wandering across a perfect sky, a little family of stray clouds was a sacrament of humanity's lonely pilgrimage in search of home. All of us, I'm sure, in that sacred space, were connecting with unspoken, unspeakable dimensions of our being – another word for silent adoration. Maybe it was something like this the Pope had in mind when he pondered about the graces hidden in such places – the moments, the memories.

One last example of what the Pope may have meant by reminding us of the deeper meaning of those 'places we played in', experiences that we tend to return to, often at unexpected times – our childhood homes and streets and fields. The days and places of our youth become so special to us in later years. And in summertime, especially, we dream about them. The warm winds make us vulnerable to forgotten moments – and comfort our hearts. There is often an ache in us when we look back on our lives. Something of God is alive and well in us then. There is the glow of divinity in the immediacy, the 'full-on' attitude, the sense of excitement and openness that graces those years. Small wonder that Jesus reached for a child when they asked him for a role model. Jesus was as much God in his childhood as he was at the traumatic end of his life in his last week of pain and resurrection.

*Now I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy
As the grass was green.
The night above the dingle starry.
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes.
And honoured among wagons, I was
Prince of the apple towns. From Fern Hill, Dylan Thomas*

(An Astonishing Secret pp 89,91)