

## Daniel's Reflection for Week Beginning 17th January FINALLY COMES THE MYSTIC – Part 1

'When I saw him walk out through those prison gates on Robben Island; a young man with shining eyes declared on television after Nelson Mandela's funeral, 'the deepest experience of a personal freedom surged through my heart.' Listening to him speak, you just knew that his life had radically changed. Something precious had been unlocked in the core of his being and he would never forget.

We notice the same kind of phenomenon with regard to the presence of Pope Francis among us. Seemingly effortlessly he has reached into countless hearts and unlocked their blocked capacity for dreaming the possible, and for seeing imaginatively. And once the first blindfold is removed, the rest follows. This chapter celebrates the recovery of the mystical for the human heart and for the Church.

Beyond anything the Pope may or may not achieve by way of structural reforms and re-building, this breath of inner freedom has happened for countless seekers in the most profound regions of their souls, and of the world. The veil has been lifted for people, a personal identity has been revealed within them, the hunches of their hearts have been validated, their prophetic and mystical voices restored.

Every day that passes, Pope Francis is shifting the focus from the outside to the inside, from the abstract general principle to the living breathing human being. People feel trusted now - a divine gift that enables them to trust themselves. It is difficult to describe that surge, that lurch of the heart, that liberation of the soul when such a realisation happens. In 'The Opening of Eyes' poet David Whyte writes;

*'It is the opening of eyes long closed.*

*It is the vision of far off things*

*seen for the silence they hold.*

*It is the heart after years*

*of secret conversing*

*speaking out loud in the clear air.'*

It may be once in a decade, or once in a lifetime that eyes are ready to open for this fragile glimpse of recognition, this unrepeatable moment when something blurred comes into focus, when something vaguely known comes into sharp relief. At that moment an irreversible transformation takes place. And only transformed people transform others. Pope Francis talks like a man who, after much personal fear and anxiety, much personal distress and guilt, has found love, a wondrous love, and wants nothing more than to share it.

The human spirit is diminished by constant constraint. There is a strait-jacket that prevents creativity, self-expression and becoming. Fearful religion, with its brainwashing, its threats, its self-obsession isolate people from their own inner wisdom and authority. And there are moments in people's lives when, into this cellar of the soul, a new light shines. Enter the mystic! An awakening happens. At the most precious part of human nature a voice is heard, a finger beckons, a long-awaited dawn is breaking.

From the rubble of clericalism and narcissism, from the confusion and frustrations of decades, new and liberating paradigms of possibility, like a long-awaited spring, are blessing the people, the Church, the world. Whyte ends his poem with a description of people's astonishment at recognising the transcendent mystery in the solid realities of their lives.

*'It is Moses in the desert  
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.  
It is the man throwing away his shoes  
as if to enter heaven  
and finding himself astonished,  
opened at last,  
fallen in love with solid ground.'* (David Whyte, *The Opening of Eyes*)

A whole other attractive space opens up for us, a way of thinking, of choosing, of seeing, of being – an invitation to imagine a radically renewed way of living the mystery. This is the work of the mystic. An exciting and compelling True North is calling us towards another horizon. Something within us, from the very beginning, is coded for this calling. There is a blueprint within us for recognising the inner truth of things, a facility for finding the loving meaning at the heart of everything. Pope Francis describes this readiness as ‘a deep yearning, an unconscious kind of heart-knowing about the truth of God, the truth about humanity’ (EG n.265).

The new Pope’s liberating vision, ‘my one dogmatic certainty,’ is that every single person is the home of God, that all created reality is the place of revelation. He is teaching us to sense a holy presence in everyone and in everything. This aching awareness was surely visible, etched into the lines of his face as he tenderly wrapped his arms around the head of the man disfigured by neurofibromatosis, when he kissed the feet of a young Muslim woman who had committed a crime. There was something beautiful, uncontrived, and deeply sacramental in these instinctive gestures.