

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 30th December –

Never too late to begin

While the New Year's Janus, the two-faced Roman god of gates and doorways, is always depicted as staring unrelentingly at the past and into the future, our God of Epiphany is embraced as forever creating new possibilities from within the womb of the present. I like to think of January, my birth month, as the month of courageous beginnings. There is something of the child about January. We sense at this time the stirring of eternal newness. The earth itself seems to be breathing more deeply in anticipation of Spring. This year such sentiments have particular relevance for me as I struggle with my new, unexpected and unbidden burdens.

Short of nature itself, there is nothing that epitomises the constant condition of readiness for new beginnings more than childhood does. Children delight in exploring possibilities to their limits is the sacrament of God's creative spirit at work in their hearts . . . In Crossings, Mark Barrett OSB quotes Zen Master Suzuki : 'In Japan we have the phrase shoshi, which means beginner's mind. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few.'

Beth and Norman were in their eighties. I visited Norman in hospital after he had damaged his foot while making a frame for one of Beth's paintings. In a matter-of-fact way they had asked me to recommend parts of Ireland suitable for their next move. And oh yes, Scotland, Wales or France would be fine too. They wanted to leave Ripon, in North Yorkshire, for somewhere new. I was impressed by their inner freedom. There was something childlike in their plans. And, as I left, Beth called out: 'We could do with a quiet place. I'm learning to play the cello.'

There is something about beginning, or beginning again, that stirs our hearts. Particularly mine, just now, as my future plans have all been utterly changed, and, I suppose I might say 'A terrible beauty has been born'. The drive towards a new dawn is a pure gift of grace, an experience of God's continuing incarnation in that tight place between failure and hope. From within his own darkness, the poet Brendan Kennelly wrote:

Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
That always seems to give in
Something that will not acknowledge conclusion
Insists that we forever begin. . .

January, the month of courageous beginnings. We grow or we die. The poet Goethe urges us : 'Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.' And whenever your heart desires to begin another journey, the whole universe conspires to see you on your way.

(Already Within pp14-17)