

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 14th May Open Your Eyes

I have long wondered why the risen Jesus was unrecognised by Mary and the disciples but something clicked in my heart as I recently listened to the Dominican, Timothy Radcliffe. It wasn't, he said, that they knew Jesus before and did not recognise him now. It was more that they never really knew him, or rather, as Herbert McCabe put it, 'they thought they knew him,' and now they were meeting the real Jesus as if for the first time. The miracle of Easter was already opening their eyes. The blindfold preventing them from fully recognising him before was now being removed. Love was bringing a clear vision. It was transforming the blurred, the false; it was revealing the real, the beautiful. For one bright moment they glimpsed pure truth.

In one of John O'Donohue's last poems he speaks to the mother of a young criminal:

No one else can see beauty in his dark and life now. His image has closed like a shadow. But he is yours; and you have different eyes that hold his yesterdays in pictures no one else remembers. He is yours in a way no words could ever tell; and you can see through the stranger this deed has made him and still find the countenance of your son.

The gift of true seeing has always been at the heart of Christianity. Easter is about taking away rather than about adding on; more about subtraction than addition; more about unblocking than increasing. It happened to those on the road to Emmaus. Pope Benedict in *Spe Salvi* writes, 'Before the risen Christ's gaze, all falsehood melts away . . . The holy power of his love sears through us like a flame.' No wonder their hearts burned within them. And then, before their very eyes, the fierce invincibility and utter vulnerability of our human God constellated in a fistful of bread on the rough surface of a wine-stained table in a country inn. Easter is the death of illusion, the window of recognition, the work of restoration. Redemption is the clear courageous vision of what happens, of what is. Too often, in our fear of naked, true 'isness' we shrink from it. While we are created for truth we cannot bear too much reality! 'We would rather be ruined and changed,' wrote WH Auden. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and see our illusions die.' Thus, as Francis Thompson knew, 'with our estranged eyes we miss the many-splendoured thing.'

'Something prevented them from recognising him.' What a striking way of putting it. Maybe the thing that prevented them from recognising him wasn't a thing at all. Maybe it was an absence that still blinded them – the absence of a fully purified vision. Love fills in the gaps and heals the flaws. It sees perfection from within, the beauty already there. We call it the sacrament of presence - of real presence.

(*Unmasking God* page 28,29)