

## Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 20th January –

### Priests and Priestesses of the Home

**'What is holiness?' the Pope was asked. 'It is the mother bringing up her children, the father working to provide food for the family, those who suffer in silence, those who quietly serve others'. (EG 125, 129)**

How would you answer that question? Would you talk to your questioner about being a Catholic Christian, avoiding sin, worshipping God, believing all the doctrines, observing all the rituals? Were you impressed by the Pope's reply? True to his fundamental and radical commitment to Incarnation, he instinctively recognised the core of holiness as basic family life, as creative love, as a healing, caring home and community. He knew that perhaps nowhere more than in the heartfelt dynamic of married life, where the human spirit stretches itself in its trusting and letting go to the limits of its potential, is this expression of incarnate love more clearly symbolised and sacramentalised. He helps us discover that every 'ordinary' human home is the unexpected place where God lives too. Even where there is suspicion and deceit, married life remains an epiphany of mystery, a participation in God's own challenging essence.

Any time we say to each other 'I'm trying to love you, to forgive you,' or 'I still believe in you, trust you,' that is also the ever-present expression of God's incarnate covenant with us, and within us, constantly healing and completing each day, all that is imperfect. As we know by now, there are no longer two kinds of love, of forgiveness – a divine level and a human one. Incarnation has revealed and confirmed that every genuine human emotion is ratified in heaven. Everything human and everything divine have now become one. Our very lives are God's only and preferred way of completing us, saving and divinising us, intimately and always loving us.

And all of this is happening in the living rooms and kitchens of every family. The home is, indeed, a holy place. It is the nursery of divinity. It is the really real church. As midwives of mystery, the work of most parents is unrelenting. Their whole lives are spent in coaxing and persuading, with the 'mother-tongue' (a beloved phrase of Pope Francis), from within reluctant shadows into the light of day, God's fleshed, unfamiliar beauty. It is the continuing of Incarnation, the fleshing of real love. The role of the institutional church, with its doctrines and sacraments, is basically to 'mother' that holy place, to protect it, heal it, nourish it, purify and intensify it.

And there is an urgent energy within our domestic world waiting to be released into the church. The home is a cauldron of emotions, all now charged with redemptive presence; for that reason it is also a powerhouse of renewal within the church. The passions and prayers, the storms and whispers, the blame and the blessing – are all part of that graced energy. Everything that happens in the unbelievably complex fabric of family life, the light and dark of it, has God's life-giving heartbeat within it, God's loving signature set to it.

And we go to Mass on Sundays to remember that; to celebrate together the extraordinary revelation that no moment in family life or outside it is 'merely' human or worldly or secular, but rather a place of grace. Every threshold, 'every gate,' as St Catherine of Siena put it, 'is a gate to heaven.'

Marriage and family is the gate, the threshold through which couples go in hope to reach their fullest potential. Partners save or destroy each other to the extent that they draw out the true self, the imago Dei, in each other – or not. And what is surprising is that this comes about, not because of marvellous promises or achievements, but in the most ordinary events, attitudes, relationships and duties of the home. It is so often a great comfort and consolation for parents to see the daily demands of their married life in the light of Incarnation, where everything is revealed to be potentially 'full of grace'. Catholics go to Mass to be assured of this. (*An Astonishing Secret* pp237,238)