

## Daniel's reflection for week beginning 3rd October Sacraments of what happens

Whether we use the word 'sacrament' in terms of Jesus Christ, of the Church or of the individual rites that vary between traditions, we are talking about celebrations of ordinary and extraordinary life, about validating the authenticity of human experience and about the individual and communal need for purification, discernment and transformation in the vicissitudes of our fragile existence. The first step towards a deeper understanding of sacraments is to see them in the context of a world already permeated and filled with God's presence.

The art is to enable people to become what they already are. The phrase 'receive who you are' accompanied the offering of the holy bread at the Communion of the mass in the early years of Christianity. 'You are the Body of Christ.' Grace is orientated to our humanity in its fullness. God's basic gift to people is the lives they live and the good earth from which they make their living. In *The Furrow*, James Mackey writes: 'The life which is now being called God's primordial and perennial grace to man is precisely the life of everyman's everyday experience. It is man's working and eating, walking in the fields or on the seashore, playing for his team or dancing in his club, sleeping with his wife or talking with his friends, suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or holding out a helping hand to his fellow man, deciding what is best with the best guidance he can get and getting up for Mass on Sundays. All that is grace.'

Instead of superficially perceiving those 'outside the church' as somehow unfinished or incomplete, or even nameless or neutral, or worse still, as blind and lost, perhaps, following the sensitivity of Jesus to all that his father has created, our church will, one day, find its very meaning and mission in proclaiming the essential holiness of all people, the sacred heart of all creation. Is God diminished when God's family is sanctified? Does the church lose when the world grows more truly healthy? Is not the very work of the spirit to reveal the innate worthiness and beauty of matter? Is it not only in the arena of the life of the world that sin and evil can be encountered and transcended? . . .

I never cease to be amazed at such glimpses into the meaning of revelation. And whenever we share it with others, the reaction is similar. After talks, workshops and presentations about such an understanding of the mystery of incarnation, invariably there will be those who say something like, 'What you have said is not new. We have always known it in our hearts. We have never doubted the sacredness of our lives, of our childbearing and our daily work, of our struggles to survive and grow, of our efforts to forgive and start again. Our hearts have always told us that these are holy tasks. All that's new is that now we have heard it said.' What a deep transformation it would trigger off around the Christian world were this good news to be proclaimed wherever the people are gathered around the table of the Lord.

*(Treasured and Transformed pp 136 - 139 )*