

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 22nd May - Safe Haven for the Lost

The Church, like Jesus, is meant to measure us at our tallest, to celebrate our divinity from the moment of our birth, to keep our focus on the beckoning horizons of possibility. It traces for us the hidden shape of God in all Creation, the smile of God in all religions, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in a world called the body of God. The Church is there to reveal to us another courageous way of living, a way of believing in the light while it is still dark.

People are waiting to be reassured of this salvation, to be comforted and reconciled within their endless complexities, wounds and restlessness. We are congenitally unfaithful, we are forever tempted, we sin seven times a day. People ache to belong in the inclusive company of those who believe that forgiveness is a non-negotiable way of life.

This is the real universal priesthood. All our hearts are anointed by virtue of the sacrament of birth and baptism.

Theologian John O'Donohue sees ordained priesthood as the precious sacrament of the natural and graced priesthood of every human heart. Without this sacramental vision of human holiness at the centre, all around becomes paralysed, disconnected, and falls away. It is happening now.

The Pentecost spirit is stifled, the gospel is domesticated, the prophets are silenced. There is no wonder any more, or silence, or gentleness. A hardness has set in. Damaged beauty needs a new design – a design that is already traced in the deepest spiritual centre of each member's innermost soul, of each community's commitment to inclusive acceptance and respect.

As a mother holds her child closely while teaching her about the hard lessons of life, the Church of Jesus is called to be present to us in the same way. We are all failed human beings. Too often we have spoiled what love is, broken our holy vows and damaged precious lives in the process. The Church is there to gather us close in our sinfulness, to tell us that it is possible to start all over again, to show us how our pain can be the saving of us. If we are not carefully shown by mother Church how to make our wounds into sacred wounds, we invariably become bitter.

If we are not sensitively drawn to find grace at the heart of our pain, that very heart will go out of us. We long for the tenderness of the fully human Jesus holding and healing us in our hurting, liberating us from the ever-present temptation to despair. There is nothing so like God as being free from fear. . .

Our image of the God we have preached is too small. So is our understanding of Church and of sacraments. The promises of our Saviour were never meant for entitlement for the privileged, or for those who belong to any given institution. They are there as lighthouses for the lost, lifeboat stations for all who are desperate, beacons of pure love for those who are truly poor in their deepest being.

This is the bright message that our people want to hear every Sunday as they prepare for another daunting Monday morning. Loved back into their blessed essence by the community of Jesus, they remake their broken promises.

It is high time for another Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is too surprising, elusive and totally unpredictable to be contained in any institution. Like the wind, she is utterly free – free to sing of a God who has no favourites, who is passionate about our humanity, who forgets our sins and carries to a safe haven every single one of her children. . . .

We are already saved. We do not have to beg for such graces any more. We are all forgiven already for everything. The time and task now is to believe those amazing graces, to thank God for them, and then to heal and empower others by forgiving them generously, and by reminding them of their own fragile beauty, yet their immense power.

This is the emerging Church we are called to nourish anew. It is starting to blossom from within our hearts and our homes. Its seeds have always been within us.

(Unmasking God 129, 130, 131)