

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 19th September Sensing the Divine Presence

We are gently challenged by the incarnation to trust in the extravagance of the divine heart. At all times this beautiful world is encompassed by God's love.

Even if we wished, we would be hard put to avoid the experience of God. The experience of God is practically inescapable. We cannot help coming into the embrace of divine compassion whenever we experience anything. Michael Skelley SJ writes, 'We do not sometimes have experiences of love, fear, ourselves, or anything else and then also have experiences of God. The basic, original experience of God, on the contrary, is the ultimate depth and radical essence of every personal experience.' Until this is clearly understood it is very difficult to truly grasp the essential meaning of worship or liturgy or the celebration of the sacraments. Before the Sunday Eucharist can be a celebration of spiritual and joyful healing and empowerment for us, every human encounter must be seen as somehow an encounter with God.

The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh finds God in the scattered fragments of each day. Probing into the commonplace he contemplated the eternal. Writing about the loving mystery that is easily ignored or overlooked because of its hidden nature, Theologian Karl Rahner feels the need to 'dig it out, so to speak, from under the refuse of the ordinary business of life'. This detection of the quiet gift of the abundant life, waiting to be discovered in the shadow and light of each night and day, is the work of the mystic. There is no doubt that we are called to awaken and nourish the mystic already alive and well within each one of us. To deny this child of wonder within us, to refuse to acknowledge our lonely mystic, is to reduce our life to a grey dullness, to starve our imagination, to stifle the Holy Spirit.

Mysticism has to do with the search for the hidden love and meaning, for the experience of the abiding, absolute mystery of God, in the ordinary things that happen during our days and nights. This is particularly true of the positive and wonder-filled moments that come our way. What needs to be emphasised is that, on our part, a certain attuning and sensitising is necessary. We must work at this kind of vigilant awareness. Priest-scientist Teilhard De Chardin spoke of acquiring the 'skills' of perfecting the sacramental imagination. Beyond looking, even seeing, there is the graced gift of 'recognising' . . .

Unless we are aware of the sacramental nature of all reality and of the fact that our whole Christian life is worship, we cannot fully appreciate the constantly revealing mystery of the incarnation, of the church and of the individual sacraments. What has been said up to now is that the world and all it contains is created out of the extravagant and unconditional love we call God. The breathtaking mystery of creation, past and present, is an incredibly beautiful sign of compassion, communicated to people, and reflecting the wisdom and loveliness of God. This, in itself, makes the world already holy and sacred. And then, this presence of the Spirit and the Word which were there from the beginning, as St John (and the sacraments) remind us, is fleshed in Jesus Christ, consecrating again from within, a nature and an earthly reality that was sorely in need of salvation. 'Make ready for Christ,' shouts Thomas Merton, 'whose smile, like lightning, sets free the song of everlasting glory, that now sleeps, in your paper flesh, like dynamite.'

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