

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 1st July: Wake up to your sleeping power

We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone ... Yet all is not lost ... No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone in the world not to forget our dignity ... 'As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning ... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.'
(The Earth Charter) [LS 202, 205, 207]

In a selfish society where individualism reigns, it is so easy to forget our essentially relational identity, so easy to lapse into the false isolated self as though this were the true measure of who we are. While we are most fundamentally defined by the image of the God in whom we are so carefully fashioned, we also carry the deepest attraction for everything opposed to that definition. In the world's religions and cultures there are many names for this inbuilt deviation of the human race. Catholics will be familiar with the term 'original sin'. Our lives are a continuous interaction between our true selves and our false selves, and the dividing lines are not always easy to distinguish.

'We are summoned to become fully human,' writes Bill Plotkin. 'We must mature into people who are, first and foremost, citizens of the Earth and residents of the universe, and our identity and core values must be re-cast accordingly.' Many perceptive spiritual observers of human behaviour write of a gradual awakening in the human psyche. They notice a spreading consciousness in our grasp of the flow and blockages of our evolving condition. Richard Rohr refers to a 'great turning'. It is to this emerging world view that Pope Francis is pointing. His understanding of the mystery of Incarnation inspires him to this conviction of a profound stirring within the soul of the world in these times. Yet his awareness of what he calls 'compulsive consumerism and collective selfishness' and of the litany of human deviation that punctuates his encyclical, all of which are resisting and destroying this dream of the Earth, is filling his heart with anxiety and urgency too.

The Pope calls on our inner strengths. He is a great believer in the grace at the depths of things, the resurrection that will not be thwarted, the springtime in the Earth that is invincible. The pulse of grace is stronger than the destructive forces in our hearts. He writes that 'human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning ... embarking on new paths of authentic freedom'. Here he is calling on 'everyone' – teachers and leaders in all governmental and religious institutions of the world. He wants Catholic people of influence to be counter-cultural, the hallmark of true Christian education. His hope springs from his incarnational belief in the invincibility of the Holy Spirit. . .

Deeply conscious of the battle between light and darkness in an evolving world, in *Evangelii Gaudium* the Pope urges us, with hope, to be involved wholeheartedly: 'Each day in our world beauty is born anew ... Human beings arise, time after time, from situations that seemed doomed . . . Resurrection is an irresistible force' (EG 276). He quotes from The Earth Charter – something not done by a Pope in an encyclical before.

Through this effort he hopes for 'the awakening of a new reverence for life – and its celebration'. 'Reverence' is such an evocative word. It is a waking up to seeing more clearly, to perceiving beauty and honouring it where we missed it before. It is a coming alive to 'presence', bringing a sense of tenderness. We desperately need to retrieve our capacity for reverence. In all of these exhortations of the Pope as reflected in the Earth Charter, the plea is that we should learn to love more, to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start. This calls for a deeply personal and universal awareness about vital issues such as poverty, environmental protection, justice, peace, equality, sustainability and, eventually, a sense of celebration. But for now, changing your lifestyle, your world view, is a challenging and painful process; it is a kind of dying. And there is no other way.

(An Astonishing Secret pp130-132)