

## Daniel's reflection for week beginning 16th January - Slow down over Aintree Hospital

*(As we approach the 3rd anniversary of Daniel's death, this is the 1st extract of 3 from 'Dancing to my Death', where Daniel's searing honesty shines forth as he seeks to understand God's presence in the midst his struggles with cancer and a new stoma.)*

The days move slowly on but there are no changes to each morning's shock. Now I know that my condition is not a nightmare from which I will awaken. The same dull fog envelopes my heart and my mind. I try so hard to make some sense of it all, to find reasons not to despair, to glimpse the tiny light of a vague comfort. With grim humour I remember a story about a believer who maintained that every day he woke up as a convinced atheist. But as the morning wore on, and as he resurrected his favourite understanding about the Faith, by lunchtime he was once more a Christian!

My world revolves around an empty bag. Grace for me lies in whether the blocked poo, in a blocked colon, can find its way along its new pathway, still bleeding, into that waiting stoma bag. Can you believe it? Is the glory of God reduced to this? I recall again Pope Francis spoke of the divine beauty of a speck of dust. Here am I seeing the work of the Holy Spirit in a speck of poo! Please do not be offended at my repetition of this unfamiliar spiritual imagery. It is a small, non-negotiable consequence of the traditional theology of nature and grace. Ours is a bloody, broken, blemished and beloved story of love, suffering and redemption. There is no alternative to these truths. This is the only way for me these days. But it was the same for the crippled, pitiful and destroyed body and mind of a distraught and shrunken Jesus on a tree of torture, and it is the same for everyone in their own particular way of the cross.

And the same for Mary too. While unrecorded in our so-hygienic infancy narratives, Mary, as we have just been remembering, would have gasped and pushed and done all the things that any normal mother giving birth would do. There would have been screaming and blood and water and a placenta on trodden, dirty straw; there would have been a bewildered baby Jesus who would have been gasping for air, learning to breathe, and later, to be potty-trained like any other child. Seems like our Church, in its teaching and preaching, has perennially skipped so many of the early details that would have indicated the true humanity of our Saviour. What was it afraid of?

In my last book *An Astonishing Secret* I tried to explain, in a spiritual way, the interconnection, the interdependence, the utterly mutual identification, for the Christian, of Creation, Evolution and Incarnation – all the work of the divine love-energy called the Holy Spirit. Who would have thought that the actual experience of this sublime revelation, this eternal human design, this deeply spiritual and theological mystery would have become so shockingly clear to me, so radically experienced by me, in the healthy function of the humble bowel, sending some welcome specks of excrement into my waiting bag! (pp72,73)