

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 11th April SONG OF THE EARTH

On a dark, chilly evening in early March I was walking home through a small park in Crosby with my shopping. Impossible to miss, I stared at the sudden appearance of the crocuses - violet, white and blue - translucent in the shadows, staked out like a rosary between tree trunks. Overnight, from drab patches of lifeless leaves and muck, something beautifully fragile and life-giving had soundlessly emerged.

Pope Francis was sensitive to this phenomenon of early Spring. It mirrored something of Easter for him. In one of the loveliest passages in his *Evangelii Gaudium* he writes, 'When all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force . . . In the midst of darkness something new always springs to life, and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly . . . Each day in our world beauty is born anew. Such is the power of resurrection.' (276)

In his challenging book *Nostos*, Irish mystic John Moriarty reflects on the unexpected epiphanies he noticed around him as he walked through muddy patches in the meadow near his Kerry home. He wondered how those 'hints of heaven' could emerge from such a drab place. 'How could something so yellow as a buttercup come up out of soggy brown earth?' he asked. 'How could something so purple as an orchid and so perfect as a cowslip come up out of it?'

Clearly for him this was a spiritual experience, a call from his own isolation into the creative mystery below the surface of the ordinary. 'Where does the colour and perfection come from?' he asked. 'And what else is down there? What else am I walking on? To me to inhale the fragrance of a primrose, down to the soles of my feet, is a Eucharist. Only then can I walk beautifully on the earth without hurting it. Right here in our own hill meadow, I can walk in paradise.'

To walk in paradise in our own fields. Pope Francis asks whether we can carry this treasure of insights safely in our distorted perception – that heaven is here, always present, growing like the seed, struggling to flourish anew in an indifferent environment? God is always coming to be in everything that happens. And in a statement that points to his next work he writes, 'All of these (epiphanies) encircle our world like a vital force-field. The resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of history.'

Easter is not about escaping into heaven; it is about recognising this evolving earth as God's body and our true home. Resurrection does not sweep us away to a painless place but reveals the redemption in our suffering now. The lost paradise is regained in the soil of our fields and in the seasons of our souls. There is no sin, loss, betrayal, shame or despair that is final. Somehow or other, in the end, all is harvest.

The Spirit of Easter is utterly free, utterly beyond our control. It is the deepest meaning of all our experiences, of everything that exists. It is in the harshness of war, in the tenderness of touch. It lives in the darkness of despair, in the glimmer of hope. It parts the veil, it rolls away the stone, it changes the focus, it transforms our way of understanding ourselves and our world. It points away from the perfection of angels to the damaged beauty of the human miracle.

'The fact that the Risen Christ returns to embodiment tells us that salvation is first of all in this world and that embodiment is good', writes Richard Rohr OFM. 'He meets the disciples back at their jobs, the women in their very human grief, two men walking along a road, and first of all a very human friend, Mary of Magdala. He does not leave this world. He re-enters it as it is and reveals its radiance.'

Everywhere accessible but contained nowhere, God cannot be confined any more to people of a certain race or religion. Where life itself is, God is. The energy of being is the breath of God. Incarnate in the heart of flesh the divine heart beats. 'There is no Catholic God' said Pope Francis. 'There is God, and I believe in the incarnation. This is my Being. And there is a spark of it in everyone.'

And in everything. When contemplated lovingly, a crocus in the mud can transform our understanding of God. Thomas Aquinas said that if we get creation wrong, we get God wrong. The magnificent Easter Vigil celebrates two revelations – the first is God's incarnate presence in nature from the very beginning, the second is the full, final and definitive incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

The stirrings of life in the darkness of the earth fills Pope Francis with a unique insight into the meaning of Easter energy. He senses the impulse that runs through all creation. The mystic in Dylan Thomas recognised these invisible connections too:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower

Drives my old age . . .

The force that drives the water through the rocks

Drives my red blood.

What begins in the soil is completed in the soul. Nothing that happens is unimportant or irredeemable. Even in the most neglected and most desperate victims across our planet Earth the seeds of an Easter lie hidden. Resurrection is what we were created for. But we perennially celebrate it and perennially forget all about it. We remain blind to its wonder, deaf to its transforming harmonies. Bad religion worships itself.

But grace goes on. Irrespective of religion, God's energy flows through everything. The landscape does not change but our eyes do. We watch for the small hourly miracles deepened and defined against eternal meaning. Easter perennially emphasises the utter earthiness of divinity – and the divinity of each daily act. Was the poet Pauline Matarasso pondering 'the paschal mystery' when she wrote this?

Reaching her arms high

she thrust them through

to peg love's laundry in the sky.

And white against the blue

her banners flew.

(Horizons of Hope p 122)

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