

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 14th November – A Spirituality of Humanity

If our religion, our going to Mass, our being Catholics is not purely about making us more sensitively aware of the fragility and frailty and fears of both ourselves and those we serve, then what are they about? If grace does not fill us with the courage and the power and the energy to work miracles for each other, then is it not all too heavenly to be of any earthly use? The Catholic traditional theology of nature and grace is about one revelation only – that it is in the authenticity of our humanity that we are redeemed, saved, and become like God's own self. It is called 'the sacramental vision'. It is the vision that enables us to see God's own life in the life of the one we are present to; to hear God's own incarnate story in the story we are now being told.

There is need for a humility before the mystery of another human being; a sensitivity and a compassion. Just as God is completely and uniquely present in the small child, in a way that can never be matched later, so too, in the very old person, there are aspects of the image of God made visible that can only ever be revealed at that time of life.

This can only come when we have a humility, a sensitivity and a compassion for the God who lives in our own hearts. 'To live on the outside what we already know in the inside.'

Otherwise we hurt the ones we set out to help. We say the inappropriate things – well-meaning we may be, but secretly hurting because of our own lack of depth, superficial ways, and the absence of a true vision. Some of you will know exactly what I mean. We act out of our ego rather than out of our essence.

Our words come from the state of our heart. The invisible power, the inner authority, that reaches the mind, the body, the spirit. What happens when we touch, heal, bless, assure people that they are forgiven – all depends on how surrendered, how broken, how given-over our own lives are to God. We preach/teach/serve who we are. Do we know who we are? What is the state of our own heart and mind? Without our own continual, inner conversion and deep awareness of the shadow and the light, the sin and the grace, the death and the life, we will at best be forgiven by those we are privileged to serve, at worst betray them

For God's light to shine through us, for the compassion of God to be incarnated through our words, our eyes, our touch, we need eternal vigilance in our own lives; there is no end to the subtlety of the ego, the vanity that is alive and will in all of us, the tell-tale desire to talk about our success. It is so hard for some of us – especially the 'religious' ones! - to be truly vulnerable. Until we are, we need to be very careful in the way we attempt to serve others. Why? Because what we do not transform we transmit. If we have not identified and transformed the bitterness in our own hearts, we will awake, or enflame, the seeds of bitterness in others. For some strange reason, the later years of life, instead of being experiences of a great and unique sense of freedom and the abundant life, can be filled with regrets, remorse and bitterness. Most of us know the source of such bad memories. That's why we need to be so graced and careful.

I'm talking about the Spirituality of Humanity. It was in the humanity of Jesus that God was revealed. In his raw, needy, tempted, imperfect humanity that God delightedly chose to be made known to us. The humanity of Jesus gave off so much love that miracles happened all over the place – enemies were reconciled, loaves were multiplied, the sinners were put before the righteous elders, a child (who, like shepherds and foreigners were considered to be 'outside' the 'chosen' ones) was held up as the ideal to be achieved by all; the Christian community was born.

It is the same with us. As within so without. And without some quiet, silent time every day, we will never get below the surface of our lives. Nor below the surface of anyone else's life either. Karl Rahner saw all baptised people as priests. He saw all pastoral work as arising from the graced relationship between the individual and God. He saw this intimate relationship as inseparable from our care of each other. And he emphasised the priority of the love within the individual heart only because he feared the loss of that personal fire in an over-emphasis on good works alone (Quotes from others)

That is why we need a renewed, more human, more compassionate Church and a radically re-visioned understanding of the Sacraments – to keep reminding us of, and empowering us for, this astonishing truth.

(Taken from a retreat given to Catholic Care Staff)