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## Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 2nd June –

### The Infinite Horizon

At 84 Samuel Becket was asked about the possibility of his retirement. "What!," he exclaimed, "Me? Retire? Never – not with the fire in me now!" Not all of us are that lucky. In my travels I meet teachers and priests for whom the original vision of their vocation has all but disappeared. There seems to be a universal kind of ennui, a deep-seated sense of pressure, that is driving people to retire as soon as possible. Equally worrying, whether it has to do with increasing bureaucracy, target-setting or appraisals, the very soul seems to have dropped out of the world of work for many. How do we restore a new energy to our lives by finding a lost balance and poise? Is there a way of building into our days, a ground, a centre and a reminder of what is at the heart of all our endeavours. Something that would provide a context and a balance against which to measure and nurture our energies. An extraordinary thing is that it isn't really the amount of work we do that wears us out. Burn-out has more to do with the absence of enthusiasm and dedication. When we work with a passion, everything changes. When our heart is in our work, the work itself becomes a kind of extension of our hearts. Taking pride in what we do transforms the weariness.

When I go back to Ireland I'm always struck by the Angelus as portrayed on TV. It is a valiant effort to recover a kind of timing and fine-tuning of the way we are present to whatever we are doing at that moment. At twelve and six, the bells are tolled. During the pealing, workers from a variety of professions, are depicted as lifting their heads and pausing for the length of a few breaths. You sensed they had shifted their awareness to another place. They had moved, for a moment, inside themselves, drawn to a horizon deep within their own soul. It did not seem to be so much a distraction as a way of living more fully in the present moment, of being more present and devoted to the immediate work of their hands and eyes.

There is a story that I love which illustrates the grace of this awareness. Two men were building a wall – long and high, one at each end. When asked what he was doing, the first brickie replied that, for a start, he had no interest whatever in his work. A wall is a wall is a wall. He was bored and listless. Brick after brick, day after day, month after month. He longed for Fridays; he hated Mondays. With no interest or involvement, his work was slowly killing him.

"I'm creating a cathedral," murmured the other man. "This is the South Wall of it. I've seen the plans. It will be such a beautiful building. I can't believe I'm part of it. When I watch the young children playing around here, I can see them and their own children, worshipping in this holy and lovely place for the decades of their lives."

When talking to parents, teachers and priests, I often tell this story. It transforms the way we see things. It is what the Incarnation has revealed. It is what the sacraments are for. It is why God created the world – so that we would one day tumble to the amazing reality that lies beneath what we too often term as 'ordinary'. That is why the story about the two workmen is called 'The Infinite Horizon'. There is an infinite horizon to every single, routine, menial task we perform. The heavens reverberate to the least of our whispers or acts of love.

The Angelus rings out over the countryside of Ireland, not to distract the people from their daily labour into a more heavenly reality. It rings out only so that the forgetful eyes of their souls can be reminded of the treasures of grace at their fingertips. As the Prophet said, beyond the boredom and pain, work has a divine dignity around it. It is love made visible. This is what the Eucharist accomplishes for us each Sunday. It parts the veils and reveals to us that the liturgy of the Church serves only the liturgy of Life, that all work is holy work; that the sacred place we search for is the very ground on which we stand. That every bush is a burning bush.

In his book *Crossing the Unknown Sea* David Whyte suggests that what opened the heart of Moses was not hearing God's voice from the bush saying 'You are standing on holy ground', but the moment he looked down and realized not only that he stood in God's presence, but that he had been standing in that presence all of his life. Every step of his life had been on holy ground.

*It is Moses in the desert, fallen to his knees before the lit bush.*

*It is the man throwing away his shoes, as if to enter heaven  
and finding himself astonished,*

*(Excerpt from Tablet article)*