

Daniel's reflection for week beginning April 30th – The Senses Have It

It is often said that people are searching for meaning in their lives. But could it be rather that they are looking for evidence that they are really and truly alive?

A boy sat on the steps of a building with a battered hat by his feet. A cardboard sign read: 'I'm blind. Please help.' The hat held a few small coins. A man was walking by. He dropped a Euro in the hat, picked up the sign, turned it around, wrote something on it, and put it back near the boy. Soon the hat began to fill up. That afternoon, the man who had written the new words on the sign came back to see how things were. Recognising his footsteps, the boy said: 'You are the one who changed my sign this morning. What did you write?' The man said he only wrote the truth, but in a different way from the boy's words. The new sign now read: 'You are enjoying a beautiful day but I cannot see it.' Both signs told the people that the boy was blind. The first was simply a statement of fact. The second reminded the people of the gift of their sight. One was about knowledge; the other about personal experience. One about the mind; the other about the senses. Knowledge alone, ideas and concepts do not change us profoundly. Pure experience does. It is always focused, concentrated and non-dualistic. It attracts, persuades and convinces. After it, we see things differently.

Our experience is pure when we hold no filtering lens, no preconceived notions. You cannot really experience reality with the judgmental mind because you are dividing the moment before you give yourself to it. You are not free to receive. You are in control of the outcome. Your fearful mind is in charge; you are not yet vulnerable enough.

The poets knew well that nothing can match the power of authentic experience. 'The secret of it all,' wrote Walt Whitman, 'is to write in the gush, the throb, the flood, of the moment – to put things down without deliberation or framing – without worrying about their style, without waiting for a fit time or place . . . By writing at the instant, the very heartbeat of life is caught.'

Seamus Heaney, too, knew this. 'I rejoiced most when the poem seemed most direct, an upfront representation of the world it stood for . . . I loved Gerard Manley Hopkins for the intensity of his exclamations which were always equations of a rapture and an ache I didn't fully know I knew until I read him. I loved Robert Frost for his farmer's accuracy and his wily down-toearthiness . . .'

When asked about the essence of his message, Jesus replied: 'Come and see.' Come for the day and experience the presence of my company. He gathered his life's passion into one moment of washing people's feet. He used the metaphors of bride and groom, weddings and intimacies, to explain the nature of union with God. All his words and works carried the experience of grace and the grace of experience. His own essential

humanity was in evidence in that sensual experience of having his own feet washed by Mary's tears, dried by her hair and anointed with her fragrant ointment. In that sacramental moment of mutual presence, they both felt vulnerable, and they were both transformed. Before he could believe in the resurrection, Thomas relentlessly insisted on his need to touch the wounds of the risen Christ. Deep healing and true faith are mostly found within the experience of woundedness. 'Until I put my finger ...' Authentic conversion is nearly always experienced corporeally and emotionally. Thomas' own wounds had now become sacred wounds. It was to make all our pain redemptive that divine love became wounded flesh. True to the incarnation, Tertullian preached that the reality of salvation 'hinges on the feelings of the flesh! 'The Holy Spirit can only be experienced,' writes Franciscan preacher Richard Rohr. God became flesh, the place of experience. Grace is always incarnate. Faith is that attitude that empowers us to experience in healing depth, all the hard and routine experiences that each day may bring. All of this is not really surprising when we remember that God needed and desired to become our bodies, our senses, our emotions in time and space, so that divine being could be experienced everywhere, by everyone, not just notionally known by the few. It was with a view to experiencing an astonishing and redeeming intimacy with all of us that God created the world in the first place. . .

The senses have it! We look at each other and see God's face, maybe faintly, every day. We taste something of the flavours of God's presence in everything that happens to us. There is a divine whisper in every sound; even the sound of temptation. No other religion dares speak of human experience like that. Maybe our future resurrection will reveal that we have been experiencing it all our lives. We will have already felt it, 'proved on the pulse,' as John Keats wrote just before he died. 'Heaven,' wrote Fr Harry Williams in True Resurrection, 'will be recognised as a country we have already entered, and in whose light and warmth we have already lived.' We will know well when we're home.

([Treasured and Transformed pp 79 -81](#))