

## Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 20th June To be specially chosen

*Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment ... 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you' (Jer 1: 5). We were conceived in the heart of God and for this reason 'each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.' (Benedict XVI) [Laudato Si 65]*

Pope Benedict's words, quoted by Pope Francis, are balm for the soul. They picture a God who loves us unconditionally, who created us out of pure desire for our presence, who has delighted in us from the very beginning, and that delight has never wavered. There was never any lessening of that extravagant love and tenderness, never any expulsion from a mythical garden. In fact, Richard Rohr assures us that 'there is nothing we can do or say to decrease God's excessive love for us. We can refuse to believe that, we can deny it, but we cannot change it. Moreover, God's love for us does not depend on whether we are worthy, religious, or in 'the state of grace.' Baptised or not, sinners or not, we are all, always and equally, but specially, embraced by divine love. Ours is a God who always forgives, who does not fret about our sins, who never punishes in this life or in the next, who just cannot prevent the terrible atrocities of our society, but weeps powerlessly with us.

In his book *Faith Within Reason* Herbert McCabe OP writes that 'God is helplessly and hopelessly in love with us. Whether we are sinners or not makes no difference to him. He is just waiting to welcome us with joy and love.' Infected as many of us were, and still are, by a heretical image of an angry, punishing God, is it possible for us to believe Fr McCabe's healing statement? Rohr insists that God never changes his mind about us. He is simply always in love with us. What God does again and again is to change our minds about him. We are not forgiven because we confess our sins; we confess our sins because we are already forgiven.

Once and for all, in his birth, death and resurrection, Jesus the Christ has reconciled all people with their Creator God (Heb 7: 27, 9: 12, 10: 10). And we, now, in our Sacrament of Reconciliation, want to celebrate this unrepeatable Passover mercy by forgiving all others in our lives. That is really why we 'go to confession.' Assured of God's forgiveness already, we now endeavour to spread that peace in every way possible, both personally and universally. Neither McCabe nor Rohr takes sin lightly; but for them God's love is always at the heart of our weakness, our powerlessness, our constant vulnerability. And the Sacrament of Reconciliation enables us to forever remember that the irresistible divine love that transforms our hearts must always lead to our generous forgiveness of everyone in our own lives. That's the only 'penance' that matters, 'to fill up what is missing' in the one and only sacrifice of the forgiveness of Christ (Col 1: 24).

Speaking about Julian of Norwich at a General Audience (2010) Pope Benedict quoted from her *Revelations of Divine Love*: 'I saw with absolute certainty that God, even before creating us loved us, with a love that never failed and will never vanish. And in this love he did all his works, and in this love our life lasts for ever ... ' Everything depends on this trust in the extravagance of God's love enfleshed in us – the quality of the mercy Pope Francis called for during the Year of Mercy (2016). In his apostolic letter *Misericordia et Misera* he writes of the 'creativity and revolution of mercy', and the inner love that motivates and sustains it. It takes a deep-seated devotion and constant love to persevere in devoting ourselves to 'restoring to weak

and vulnerable millions' the dignity of their birthright, created as they all are, in that sublime image of God. Without this intimacy with God, the impact of the 'corporal and spiritual works of mercy' that he urges will carry no love.

Most Catholics do not believe in an unconditionally loving God. The caricature of an angry Father, drummed into us in childhood, has burned a deadly suspicion into our minds. Such indoctrination (it has been called the 'spiritual abuse' of children) destroys the possibility of ever trusting such a terrible monstrosity. Small wonder that most Catholics still regard God with a hidden fear. For generations, the clouds of threats about hell and limbo and divine anger and retribution have savagely closed the pathways into God's loving, reaching heart. We become defined as 'bad', from the beginning, rather than as beloved. How do we comfort and reassure our suffering, disillusioned, drifting young and old Church members that they are not exiled sinners in a fallen world? No! They are, instead, our Mother-God's beloved children carrying a dream of unutterable beauty.

Why do we need to be converted to this sublime and (for most) new and radical understanding of our faith? Because it will transform our hearts. 'Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment ...'. When we know the astonishing love story of our creation and evolution we develop a fierce determination to protect and defend each other, especially those who are suffering poverty in any way, and then to do everything possible for the well-being of this beautiful Earth where all is connected and held together by the leading strings of divine love and energy. Here again Pope Francis is reemphasising a most wonderful picture of God's unconditional love, and his imaginative ways of cherishing us. He paints a picture of extreme, divine love that will never end. Its infinite depth is non-negotiable. 'You were conceived in the heart of God!' Why were we never told these tender things? That we're in there, cherished, at the very heart of the mystery – a kind of fourth member in the dance of the Blessed Trinity deep within our own hearts!

*Pope Francis believes that their Christian faith will enable Catholics to find a commitment, a motivation and an energy to care and defend human dignity and the integrity of Creation. Through his devotion to the Incarnation, Teilhard de Chardin perceived a 'blaze of fire in the midst of matter'. Do those passionate words and images of his heart touch the love in yours?*

*(An Astonishing Secret p 64)*

