

Daniel's reflection for week beginning March 19th – Unblocking the Light

For the Lenten pilgrim, the most difficult aspect of the journey to Easter involves a purging of the ego and an inward transparency. It is an extraordinary challenge but one that is life transforming.

A touching film made in 2004 is quietly doing the rounds again. It's called *As it is in Heaven*. Middle-aged Daniel is a famous musician who is stressed because of the intensity of his workload. He takes a sabbatical back in his childhood village in the Netherlands. The locals enlist his reluctant help with the very mediocre church choir. 'The music is there', he told them. 'It is all around us. All we have to do is "take it down".' They do not understand him. He tries to explain that they will never succeed in allowing that true, pure sound to emerge and fill them, until they themselves are open enough, and empty enough, to trust and receive it. Much of the film is about the long, hard struggle of the singers to find the courage and inner freedom without which they will never find their own real voice. Grace, too, is all around us. Like music, as Mozart said, it fills the world. But until we become inwardly transparent there will be no true transformation. This is the real challenge and discipline of the spiritual life. Because we are blocked within, we cannot 'take it down'. Once opened, the miracle follows. It has to follow. It is the nature of grace and the grace of our nature to do so. For the inner journey to the authentic self a well-travelled route of the saints is the way of surrender. It is the relinquishing of control, the unseating of the proud ego. even for the holiest of souls, this is almost impossible to do. Suffering has been described as that state when, for whatever reason, we no longer have control over our lives or our future. In spite of our fallenness, what we are all unceasingly searching for is someone to surrender to, someone in whom we can define ourselves. 'God', writes Richard Rohr, 'is the only one we can surrender to without losing ourselves.' The irony is that we actually and finally do find ourselves, but now in a whole new and much larger field of meaning. Once we die enough to our need to control, to be independent; once we allow the utterly transforming love of God to invade the deepest levels of our complicated souls, then we notice that we are moving to another place where many things begin to matter much less to us, and a few things begin to matter much more. Another classic and connected counsel for serious Lenten pilgrims is a commitment to a painful metanoia, to a radical self-purification. We slowly begin to notice that fear and resentment block the nourishing light from restoring our souls. We start to realise that these negative, diminishing emotions are, in the words of the Ash Wednesday readings, 'corroding the spirit'. This kind of dawning readiness and openness, with its guaranteed harvest of graces, is beyond the capacity of what St Thomas Aquinas called the *anima pusilla* – the small self, the false soul. Lent is a blessed season to discover the *anima magna* within us, the large soul. So many trappings of religion fall away at that most revealing moment, when we discover that beautiful soul, when we choose it, and decide to live it into our destiny. That is when the grace notes ring in our heart. This moment has been described as the most courageous act of our lives; the personal passover for which we were born. But there is nothing automatic about it. Spiritual maturity nearly always emerges only from the experiences of futility, fall or failure. At such times, as we try to breathe into the fearful pain, we may hear an inner invitation into a deeply desired freedom. Our 'yes' to that invitation will play havoc with our daily routines, with the reign of the ego, and with our religious pretensions. It will make us think and feel about our faith in a way we never did before. It will purify and clarify our understanding of the Church, and a new, tender and demanding insight into the Gospel of Jesus will captivate our hearts.

(*Treasured and Transformed* pp55-57)