

2012

Week 17 - The Cross-roads of Discernment

A vision of wholeness can only be sustained when it springs from a conviction of the power we carry within us. The Christian is called to be empowered by divine energy. There is nothing, therefore, that cannot be achieved or overcome while this awareness is high. Nothing can harm us in the face of this pulsating, life-giving flow. It is about 'staying tuned'. It is about wild faith. It is about connecting without trying too hard. It is about acquiring a habit of quiet discernment when it comes to what is important.

That is why I have a skeleton hanging over my computer. It is not a full skeleton. Just a head – a small, weird, shrunken skinless, Hallowe'en type death's face. Mary gave me this macabre little gift as a joke. Most of my parochial, diocesan and personal desk-work happens around the computer . . . So why have I this daily spectacle of a dangling skeleton head grinning at my best efforts?

I suppose it is because it points up for me the vital difference at the cross-roads of discernment - the difference between what lasts and what does not. The finest success and the most shattering disgrace are no longer a nine-days wonder – they are scarcely a nine-days news item in the local media or in the parish bush-telegraph! So often we set our sights so tightly on a particular temporary goal and block out a hundred gifts and blessings along the way in our tunnel-vision obsession with some perceived good. 'In a straight line, no one goes very far,' the Little Prince reminds us.

So when it comes to saving my soul, a pursuit which I am reliably told has long-term implications, I now find myself conserving myself for the 'unum necessarium', the only goal that matters. Surprisingly enough, while we normally think of such spiritual concentration as having to do with things dim and distant in the eternal halls of heaven, nothing has more immediate implication for the balance of my complex self in the here and now. Any attention paid to the well-being of my spirit is like a natural and fairly immediate remedy for the ills of all the rest of me. When the spring of living water is released in the desert of my heart, the greening of all of me happens too. When the small spark of desire for God is fuelled within me, my whole self is warmed and quickened. And in spite of my perennial short-sightedness and my ever-readiness to be seduced, like an image is clarified when the waters settle, like shapes sharpen when the mists lift, a saving grace has always risen in my deepest, darkest most blessed places.

(Passion for the Possible pp172, 173)