

Week Beginning 24th March What's It To Be?

People are surprised at the extent of the choice they have about the direction of each day's living, leading to profound satisfaction or disillusion. With God's power in us, we are all blessed with the grace of choosing our way of being in the world. We do not have to be victims of what happens to us; instead we are blessed with the power of discerning our demons as disguised occasions of grace. But we do need to keep noticing the subtle ego in our desire for control, certainty and human respect: to 'pay attention to our intention' as James Redfield puts it in *The Celestine Prophecy*.

A Cherokee leader was out in the forest initiating the young members of the tribe into adulthood. In the course of the rites he told the story about the two wolves that are always fighting in every human soul – the benevolent wolf of peace and joy, the malevolent one forever on the prowl. 'And which wolf wins?', a youngster asked. 'The one you feed', was the reply. Which wolf are we feeding with every thought, word, breath of our lives?

Thomas Aquinas asks whether, as a rule, we act out of our *anima magna*, or our *anima pusilla*. The one is an option for what is generous, tending towards overlooking, letting go. The other is the habit of meanness, tending towards what is closed, negative and judgemental. It isn't about two different types of personality, more about the aspirations of each particular soul on a given day.

Imagine a horizontal line between the kinds of choices we make. At every mind's turn we are opting to move either above that line, into the light, the space, the freedom that nourishes and saves our soul: or we are going the way of wilfulness, below the line, opting for the narrow place that stifles our spirit and closes out the light. Both worlds generate a life of their own. But we grow accustomed to one. We spend most of our thinking time there. So eventually we become those thoughts. And that means that we are carrying light or darkness wherever we go.

All of this inner work is a soul-sized enterprise. To be magnanimous is a difficult habit of the heart to form. To keep substituting the blaming, resentful thought for the liberating one is truly the work of the saint. It is a spiritual skill to pause – for the brevity of a breath or the longer season of deeper sorrow – to find that space of choice, so as to discern and purify the motivation behind our response . . .

Choosing, first in many smaller ways, to let go of resentment, anxiety and of all the victim roles, while there is still time, is the only way to prepare for the final choices of our ultimate destiny. Viktor Frankl, purified in the crucifixion of his concentration camp experiences, rejoiced in what he called 'the final freedom' – the freedom to choose to love the one who was intent on destroying his life.

Lent is about choices. Jesus himself was familiar with that sacred space, the space between refusing and accepting the chalices offered by his Father during his brief life. On his Cross, he chose to forgive his enemies, to even love them. And later, at the moment of his death, after an intense struggle with his terrible doubt, Jesus uttered his whispered 'yes' to his beloved Father before his soul left him.

Our most important life choices are rarely obvious or easy. Side by side, they look alike, and often live at the same address. A friend of mine wears a small dark heart and a small bright one on her necklace. John O'Donohue hoped that at the hour of our death, when we find that through fear or frailty we chose the 'wrong' path, in God's astonishing love, the untaken choice, the un-lived destiny, is still offered as an open possibility.

(Unmasking God pp 18,19,20)