

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 13th March – WITH MY BODY I THEE WORSHIP

It seems to me that, for the most part, in God's plan, the institution of marriage is the natural way for the developing and intensifying of human love. To move from selfishness to an awareness of the needs of others – first the loved one, then the children – must be impossible without the experience of marriage. How else can the soul's desires be purified and intensified if not in the cauldron of learning to trust, to forgive, to love?

I am reasonably aware of the agony as well as the ecstasy of married life. In fact, I often think that little else really exists for many people, apart from the network of relationships that are woven around their spouses, their children, and other significant persons in their lives. It must be here, surely, that the raw material of redemption, salvation and the human experience of God happens.

Around 1995 I was called, during the night, to the Children's Ward at Leeds General Infirmary. A baby had just died. When I walked into the ward the young parents stared at me, and angrily asked, "Where is this loving God of yours now?" I remember saying that God was probably crying like they were. But what has stayed with me so clearly is that, ignoring me then, the father took his wife in his arms and said, "You know I love you." That stunning moment, when a man or a woman has done this unforgettable gesture, at the point of their tragedy, has been my privilege to experience many times in my pastoral work. It is unforgettable because it is so real, so true, and therefore, so sacred.

What I'm struggling to come to terms with, what I glimpse at certain moments of emotion and grace, is that such experiences are the only way in which God can touch and hold us, redeem and save us, renew and empower us. The healing and completing implications of the Word becoming flesh, the here-and-now meaning of a Love that has desired to be audible, visible and tangible, can happen in no other place, situation, or condition, than in the human interplay of senses, emotions and physical relationships.

The moment that our Christian theology and spirituality move away from the sobs and smiles of things, the tension and tears of things, the plights and pleasures of things, then we lose the vital, radical and shocking meaning of the Incarnation. In our deadly dualism, we find it so difficult to accept the revelation that it is God's delight to be worshipped in the way we touch and look at each other, in the way we listen and talk to each other, in the way we forgive and make love to each other.

Why is this so? We seem to have erected a separate holy edifice, created another, different institution, for God's encounter with us to happen, for the divine intimacy to take place. Is it possible that we have truly lost the plot of Creation and Incarnation? Where else can we touch, hear and smell God if not in the skin, whispers and sweat of each other? Where else is there to experience the abundant life promised by Jesus if not in the trust and encouragement of those who love us, in the almost impossible words of forgiveness from those we have hurt, in the pain of the sacrifices we make to stay faithful to our partners and so, to God?

Think of the things that put the lift and life in you, that stirs the excitement and wonder in you. Our senses and emotions, our most intimate feelings both positive and negative, our passions for the possible and our deepest despair, our sins and our failures – such are the only moments in time and space in which our incarnate God can be intimate with us. It is only here, that resurrection can ever have any meaning.

By virtue of creation and incarnation, all relationships offer the potential for feeling the reality of God each day. The senses have rightly been called the thresholds of the soul. There is simply no other way for God to be embraced. In marriage, where human love is revealed to be divine love in disguise, we have such a shining example of the

Now the amazing thing is that this very human reality called loving relationships, from which all hearts and minds draw their strength and meaning, is none other than the very mode of existence chosen by God from the beginning of time. That is the supreme truth that the Incarnation, the Christian faith, the Eucharist and all the sacraments, the preaching and teaching, the praying and fasting, testifies to. No more, no less. And it is in the agony and ecstasy of marriage, in the infinite heights and depths of human minds, bodies and souls, that the mysterious potential of human love is played out. And there, and there only, is played out too, the incarnate tenderness and compassion of God. The winning of the world for God is there for the taking. It will not be a sudden capitulation by the powers of the original sinfulness that lives in every human heart. There will be no easy surrender without many crucifixions along the way. But at least the battle will be fought in a place where human passion is the common ground. There is a most beautiful theology of marriage waiting to be explored; a courageous conversation between creation and incarnation to be entered into. Karl Rahner is so clear about the need to celebrate the liturgy of life and marriage before we celebrate the sacraments in church. There is no competition between Sunday and Monday, between the parish church and the domestic church, between the eucharist and the family meal. They need each other forever. Sacred liturgy reveals, purifies and celebrates the divinity of every human act of love. There is no other place to be holy. It is all of a piece. Everything belongs. We have forgotten that the human heart is the sacred heart. The torn tapestry must be restored once more.