

Sermon for 29.9.19

During my recent illness - that I now refer to as the week that was and please God may there never be a repeat performance -

I remembered how the mystics of old, at least some of them, had wonderful and enlightening visions of the mystery of God during their illnesses.

Julian of Norwich (14th Century mystic) received visions or sightings, as she called them - when she suffered a near death experience.

Upon her recovery, she spent over 20 years writing about the depth of their meaning - about love as God's meaning and in God's love, Christ is nearer to us than our own soul.

It is Christ, wrote Julian, who keeps substance and sensuality together, and in him they shall never be separate.

In God's love, nothing is too mundane or ordinary - but all of life has integrity and value, for we are one with God and each other, every minute of the day.

Then there was St John of the Cross, A 16th Century mystic - and the time that he spent in jail – imprisoned by his own order of monks because they objected to change and particularly the changes that he wanted to enforce about living a life of poverty and prayerful dependence upon God as part of their daily rule of life.

St John was punished greatly. The monks beat him, starved him and left him to rot in a cold and wet cell. (He did eventually escape).

It was during this time, however, that he wrote his most famous work titled, "The Living Flame."

In this Canticle he expressed his inner being and his love for God revealing someone who had accepted his oneness with God.

Now I would dearly love to tell you that during my illness I received visions of the mystery of God that I could share with you and perhaps write about them in the weeks ahead - but alas I can't.

For I didn't receive any visions and nor did I write any great prose.

But there is something that I did experience while I was sick and it was a strong desire to praise and thank god for everything in my life.

One morning early in the week I awoke filled with the overwhelming desire to praise and thank God- not for anything in particular –but simply for being God in my life.

Now I do believe that this was not something that I conjured up on my own – it was far too wonderful for anything that I could have come up with – God was the initiator of this desire. It was a gift to me so that I could respond to God's love for me when I most needed to.

I share this with you today because I think that we are met by God in this way over and over again, yet due to the clatter of life and the busyness that pervades most times of the day, we simply do not recognise what and when God is communing with us.

I'm sure that is why God spoke to me in my weakened state and in the early hours of the morning when it was quiet and peaceful and I was more open and ready to receive. At a time that I was more prone to surrender.

What I felt at this time was a wonderful sense of belonging and an awareness that I could trust God as my companion.

Spiritual writer Martin Laird once wrote about the riches that each one of us possesses – the most prized of which is the reality that God is the ground of our being, and that union with God is foundational to our humanity.

In Jerimiah we hear those profound words, *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you*, and God still knows us in this way.

And as the psalter sings, in Psalm 139, *You know me through and through*.

Yet, writes Laird, we don't normally have much awareness of this most fundamental reality.

We go off in search of what has from all eternity sought and found us.

God is the ground of our being yet we are prone to skim along on the surface of life.

The result is that our lives are rather life that of the deep-sea fisherman who was fishing for minnows while standing on a whale.¹

God is dwelling with us everywhere. For our part we need to be conscious or have awareness of this loving presence.

The most ordinary of our days contains the power and the splendour of spiritual awareness.

It is up to us to pay attention, to be present to the here and now, in order to enter more deeply into the life we have been gifted in God.

When we do, we tend to not feel any sense of separation from God or from one another.

Our care for our relationship with God is first and foremost in our daily practice –

our care and relationship with each other and in particular the needy, the neglected, those rejected by society – the Lazarus' of this world, is not an added extra or a special event in our lives – it is part of who we are - it is an integral foundational of our being human.

Our care for other animals in the world and of course the environment is part of our humanity also – it is not something that we have to work at –it is something that is already there and we just have to let God uncover in us.

In the beauty of this truth – in our oneness with God there is no chasm between life and death for God is with us and in us at every level. And the only master we follow is the one who holds us altogether in love.

Many of us in the parish have taken up the reflective daily practice using the book "The Cup of our Lives" by Joyce Rupp.

¹ Martin Laird. *Into the Silent Land*. Oxford University Press, Oxford; 2006. p28.

On day two, in her very gentle way, Joyce writes: my coffee mug reminds me that cups are containers designed to hold something refreshing, just as we are containers meant to hold the Divine Presence. Because God dwells within me, I like to think of myself as a mini Ark of the Covenant. God goes with me wherever I go. I carry God into each relationship and experience.

A powerful thought, that one.

When we look at the Christian scriptures we find that the divine presence has made a home in us. Jesus said, Make your home in me.

He used the image of the vine and the branches to emphasize that the same life that surges through all parts of the plant is similar to the life of God that surges through our being.

God is no longer just “out there”, God is also here, within us.

The spirit of Jesus lives on in our own bodily temples. We have become the home of God. ²

And all of this is of God’s doing. It is by his grace alone.

All we have to do in our relationship together, is to show up - to be present in our daily prayerful discipline - open and receptive.

Let us pray together in the words of Joyce Rupp:

Energizing and transforming God, the pulse of your presence fill our lives with love.

Remind us often that we cannot grow by our own efforts alone.

Thank you for the comfort and the freedom of knowing that it is your power working through us that creates growth in our spiritual lives. We give thanks that we are one in you and you are one in us.³ Amen

² Joyce Rupp. *The Cup of our Life*. Soren Books, Notre Dame, Indiana: 2012 p16

³ *ibid* p11.