

Reflection for Sunday 25B, 19th September 2021

We can begin to see the early signs of Autumn as the hours of daylight decrease gradually and there is also a change in the colouring of the leaves as they slowly begin to fall from the trees. We might start to imagine what might autumn and winter look like this year as the world emerges from the pandemic. The answers, as we have often discovered, are never straightforward. There is a natural flow to the seasons of the years, but as the post pandemic Church begins to shape, form and realign itself, it is perhaps difficult for us to see how the landscape is shaping itself as the map of faith starts to form a route map as to how the Church might move forward in an attractive and creative way. As people of faith, we need to find our-selves some Christian hope. There have been times when that has been a bit of a struggle. However, we need to find a pathway that offers us a renewed sense of purpose and even a new lease of life that encourages us to dive deeper, once again, into our life of faith. It has presented us with new challenges. We would never have imagined or thought, how we would have to live our faith in a post-pandemic world let alone a post-pandemic Church. We are embracing new crossroads and different places of encounter that encourage us to look at the life of faith in a different light. There are no pre-prepared answers. There are plenty of questions that we need to face. However, we have little idea of whom and what they might involve. Nevertheless, we still need to find creative ways of expressing and shaping our language of faith that can address the current challenges, not simply to the Church but also to different cultures and respective societies across the globe. We need to discover or create a sacred space that gives us the opportunity to allow this sanctuary to entice us into the realm of God. We need to let go of the darkness of the pandemic and bask in the light of God albeit in a new but hopefully authentic way. These words of Timothy Radcliffe OP, a former master of the Dominican Order may offer us some food for thought:

“How can we keep a Christian Imagination fresh when we are assailed all day by banality? How can we keep an ear attuned to the beauty of God’s summons to share his life when we are battered by an unremitting barrage of emails, Blogs, adverts, inviting us to see the world in purely utilitarian ways, stuff to be consumed, small desires to be satisfied? An hour in church will not suffice. The average American watches television for more than five hours a day. The ‘globalization of superficiality’ is like an asbestos blanket, snuffing out the fire of a vivid imagination.

We are like people who know that there is a globe but live with people who assume that it is flat and that if you go too far you will fall off the edge. It is hard to keep alive another perception of reality and of human destiny. I visited an American priory in the middle of a famous Ivy League university. I was shocked at the expensive carpets scattered over the floors. When I challenged the brethren, they replied that this is what all the members of their congregation had. They were just fitting in, which was exactly what they ought not to have done! In the noise and bustle of London’s night-time, nightingales learned that they must sing more loudly if they are to be heard. So, we Christians must sing our counter cultural song more boldly.

The traditional way in which Christians have resisted the gravitational pull of the banal has been to set aside, moments each day to recite or sing poetry. For two millennia the Church has kept alive its countercultural imagination by songs and poems, above all the wild, sometimes belligerent and often beautiful poems the Psalms. They shock us out of our trite and utilitarian way of seeing our lives. Members of religious orders gather several times a day to sing songs that jolt us out of ‘common sense’ of our society. Millions of lay people pray the breviary with us or alone. The singing of the Psalms was most vital for our forebears when our faith was most countercultural.”

Timothy Radcliffe, OP, “Alive in God: A Christian Imagination,” pages 354-355