

Art and Lectio....Rock and Sand – Home Retreat with Fr Bede 13 March 2021

“While the baby is in the background..”

“The Word becomes flesh”..in Our Lords life ..& in our own life...scripture and spirituality...[read] Iona card..Brian Woodcock...reading between the lines...opened story of Annunciation ..recognising ourselves in it...we might attempt now to go a step further than some of you will have been before...another risk...& an adventure...to look at Art & Spirituality...so called secular calling worldly images on worldly canvas..yet to discover divine essence within...Art & Spirituality...Christmas cake & wensleydale cheese...each separate...complete in itself...cake & cheese...result of ingredients...process...skills...feel intuition...appearance & smell...taste savoured...known...recognised separately...[planning of day...to make cakes...expectancy memory enjoyment tiredness but fulfilment...shared process...talked about to those not present = inclusion. Time of eating...tasting...savouring discussing congratulating...each in its own right...then put together..completely different taste experience...taste fuller deeper than sum of its two parts...taste beyond words description.

We have been brought up in a faith which speaks, preaches & acts dualism...sacred & profane...spirit & body...saint & sinner...priest & people...sanctuary & nave...art & spirituality...rock & sand.

Feedback from Advent retreat 2003: “this card caught my eye at Buckfast Abbey, passing on holiday, and I bought the lot. Maybe it’s just that the sense of perspective failed, or that an assistant placed some component of the picture in the wrong place. but I’ve never seen a Nativity where Marys compassionate gaze is on Joseph., while the baby is in the background. Lots of opportunity to wonder what they had been or were about to be talking about.” Geburt Christi..Bicci de Lorenzo ..Florence [1373-1452]

Ponder...pray in front of...let its scene sink in...notice details...wonder why?...validity of question mark...acknowledged celebrated.

Joseph seated on ground...position of lowliness...reflective of mood & his status in narrative...knees up = sign of closedness...womb position...self protection...hands clasped together locked...locking life outside; head position dejection...glum look...self pity?...outer robe wrapped round himself self contained...even feet covered over...redundant just now not going anywhere...nowhere to go?...halo reminder of his holiness...his role...his calling...his work to date...acceptor protector wrestling with dilemma...realising world interpretation of his position...”she has walked all over him”...man...Jew...elder...craftsman...not husband yet?...partners child...woman...courage...grit...determination...where does all that leave me?...s.tatus role completely reversed...a foetal pose?...a cry for recognition & help...or even to be listened to...nowhere does his voice be heard...silent or silenced?...outside stable...back to centre of story...notice shading on his robes...gold kingship authority father figure...yet edge margin facing child Jesus is tinted with red...love...passion...warmth...energy...grace...from his son...child silent no eye contact yet sense of relatedness...intimacy...awareness presence at the deepest hour of desolation...Josephs Gethsemane...prodigal moment...pig sty...”but no one offered him anything”.

Mary...comes out to him...leaves her baby momentarily...shows importance of healing process...she looks down on him...acknowledging truth of present situation...unbalanced

relationship...she dominant...yet her robes open towards him...unbuttoned..invitation into her inner self...hands joined in prayer reverence understanding for all he is going through for her and for her child...she venerates his sacrificial love..look of compassion..empathy...gaze fixed on him in love...notice...her garment trailing over his in gentle connectedness...her red garment matching reflected red on his garment...child Jesus...aware...alert...bound...grave cloths? His cradle manger looks more like a tomb...straw like rays of divinity?...sense of independence prefiguring all that is to come almost?...Mary's role complete...he “emerging” in his own right...a fringe character in painting as it freezes the moment...no one looking on him...shepherds distracted..looking up to heaven...stressing his divinity...one covering his eye from glare..other points in direction of heaven...what who do they see?.is it a prefiguring of Ascension?...sticks not crooks significant or not?...on edge of stable..uncovered...in open typically shepherd like...on margins...yet to them angel appeared...not to temple dwellers...even ox seems to hold eye contact with Mary...looking over & beyond child Jesus...between Mary & Joseph...hidden...peeping out...purposefully...knapsack...symbol of a wanderer...one about to begin a lonely journey in poverty...little to take...most of belongings left behind...travelling light...alone...monos...desert...his Lenten journey...is this feeding Josephs mood...recognising he will soon disappear his apostolate finished...”it is finished”...breathing his last...in relationship...perhaps he glimpses his knapsack out of corner of his eye? feeding his own inner fears of having to let go...a John the Baptist figure..like us about to face a wildness experience...ask you to offer prayer of thanksgiving for retreatant who noticed postcard...was moved by it...remembered her Advent retreat here...and decided to send me a copy...discipleship as shepherds in action...noticing star...following it...letting others in on it...could we perhaps ponder on sending her a copy of the painting and each of us sign it as a note of gratitude for the seed she has sown for us here this week...beyond her wildest dreams...”the Word becomes flesh”...unique taste of Christmas cake & wensleydale cheese.

“I must decrease...he must increase...”ingredient of Advent...becoming smaller...& better for it...grounded humble together...having “been there” & returned richer for it...having experienced Gethsemane...& looking forward to Resurrection & Ascension...why Shepherds & Innkeepers 2009?...having been Shepherd & Innkeepers 2005...& why now?

Wonderful image of your apostolate in your parish in family & in local neighbourhood...& through this your retreat...leaving manger like Mary...& coming out to the Joseph character...one in community...or those in community who feel isolated misunderstood left out uncertain about their future role in this Holy Family...with a knapsack packed ready just in case...for every Joseph we need a Mary...one who in spite of her own difficulties tensions tragedies doubts is able to look out beyond his or her own room in halls or rented house...to notice [1] which we are good at in spite of our skills at custody of the eyes...and react...[2] crucial difference...to take responsibility for instigating reaction...wise senpectae...“at cost”...to life in community...link of halo of Joseph to halo of Christ child = seeing Christ in wounded sick ill.

How does story finish?...wonderful meditation...”imagine..”if you were to watch to ponder to pray in front of it...an ending will emerge...a signpost for your journey through these few weeks of potential...rich soil of Advent & Christmas...then on into Lent...towards Gethsemane & Good Friday...when seed dies...& only through death is able to germinate into new life...year on year...tidal...same yet different...”new every morning..”..flotsam & jetsom...to sift...save or discard...a retreat to choose to notice..& then to risk reacting...Mary Mother of Church...your discipleship...prayer concern & presence...divinity emanating from

within...connecting to your wider Community...those who bring their gifts needs intentions to this stable...expecting an Incarnation..& discovering the fullness of a Resurrection...“a favourable time...a day of salvation..”

Supplementary Material

Home Prayers – 20 January 2021

This is Day 3 in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, with the theme this year “Abiding in Christ” two becoming one, you in Christ..we enter his person rather than his kingdom. Matthew’s gospel of the rock & sand comes to mind & prayer this morning Mt Ch 7;24-27..where the sensible build their house on rock, the foolish build on sand..very Matthew very Jewish, very black & white..Jew & Gentile..now Protestant & Catholic..

In 1965 when I left School I trained to become a Quantity Surveyor, & I realised that one of most dangerous materials to build a house on was, surprisingly, rock..if we were excavating foundations & stumbled across rock we were in difficulties; the only solution was to use pneumatic drills to break it up & take it away, at huge extra cost & delay to the project..its solidity, unrelenting, unforgiving you might say, was its downfall..& similarly if we hit sand, rather like Filey beach, we had to dig that out too..too soft too malleable, spineless..I learned the best possible foundation incorporated both rock & sand as it were..in lieu of rock, concrete, & in lieu of beach sand, sharp sand..once the foundations had been excavated, the bare earth was blinded with a 3” layer of sharp sand, the liquid concrete was poured on top, & once set..concrete takes 30days get to its premium strength..you could build the brickwork off the foundations with faith & confidence..if/when there was an earth tremor or subsidence, instead of the rock/concrete cracking under the slightest movement, the two mediums, concrete & sand, existing together & working together, absorbed the strain, the heave of the upheaval, & the structure remained “rock-solid”.. unfortunate if familiar terminology! So too our journey in faith, the Body of Christ at its best, gradually carefully being built, incorporating its various members..we need both rock & sand..we need all denominations & together we grow, ready to face the tremors earthquakes crises in life & in faith, be they abuse scandals or covid pandemics, or the moral imperatives of realising that the UK has now administered over 4m vaccinations whilst one of the poorest countries in the world, our world, has administered 25..one world one Church committed to the Common Good we sadly took a step back from in Brexit..at baptism, the one common denominator the one common sacrament we share, it is unity in diversity, built to last, & for an eternal lifetime.. as the well grounded Dominican monk Fr Herbert McCabe said in 2003 in his book “God, Christ & US” “so in thinking about Christian unity we need not just a determination to heal the wounds of the past but a warning about new wounds in the future. We need to be warned lest the real disagreements of good people should lead, not by malice, but by folly & recklessness, to new division, to another denial of the one Spirit in which we were baptised.”...& if you want to know what on earth a pneumatic drill has to do with spirituality, tune in again a fortnight today..

God of strangeness & desire

We bless you for enticing us
To the last place we wanted to be;
The place where we can hide no longer,

Where we must face our own emptiness
& see our false gods fall.
We bless you for the immeasurable relief
Of self knowledge & exposure
For the miracle of survival
& for the coming to us in unexpected guises.

Have mercy on us,
God who wrestles & embraces us,
Shatter our illusions,
Feed our hope & our hunger
With the adventurous faith of your Spirit,
Until grace is our only sufficiency.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

..the desert will sing & rejoice.. ..& the wilderness blossom with flowers
..all will see the Lords splendour.. ..see the Lords greatness & power..
..tell everyone who is anxious.. ..be strong..& do not be afraid..
..the blind will be able to see..the deaf hear.. ..the lame will leap & dance for joy..

..this is the promise of God.. ..Gods promise will come true..

Marmalade

For some years I used to visit the Poor Clare nuns at Arkley..just outside Barnet in North London..helped them practically when they needed advice on new roof for their monastery..and spiritually..each time I went they gave me some jars of home-made marmalade as gesture of thanks..clearly expecting me to bring them back to Ampleforth to share with Community..but I didn't..I kept them..to give away to folk as a small gesture of appreciation..as Procurator [Bursar] I would say Mass each weekday in Crypt of our Abbey Church and often would see our Church cleaner busily at work..one day I gave her a jar of marmalade and card to thank her for her work..she wrote me a letter ..like to share part of it with you..

“the Abbey is a beautiful place & I feel privileged to work in the heart of the Catholic surround..being in the Abbey is not work but a labour of love..many visitors walk through [floor wet or dry] and some stop to say how nice the Abbey is & how clean it all looks [feather in my cap]. Someone said to me once that it was kind of me to clean a Catholic Church as I am C of E religion but the Lord doesn't mind does he? So why should his own followers? I am devoted to my work and feel I am part of the Abbey. I know every nook & crannie in the inside of the Abbey and I feel also that the Lord knows me as much. Thank you again for your holy gift..and thank you for letting me work inside your heart.”

..and who is my neighbour?..and who really is the Christ bearer?..and all that healing & love unlocked by a jar of marmalade..home made marmalade..and Jesus says to us.."go, & do the same yourself".

Crossing Place

There is an old Hebrew prayer that recognises the journey of life upon which each person embarks. Beginning with birth & honouring death, not as an end, but as the destination, success is measured by the way in which we embrace each stage in our lives. This life journey takes us "from youth to age, from innocence to awareness, from ignorance to knowledge, from foolishness to wisdom, from weakness to strength & often back again, from offence to forgiveness, from loneliness to friendship, from pain to compassion, from fear to faith, from defeat to victory, and from victory to defeat, until, looking backward or ahead, we see that victory does not lie at some high point along the way but in having made the journey stage by stage. It is indeed a celebration of a "graced life story."

Growth on the journey centres on the struggles we experience at the various stages in our lives. In journeying from resistance & denial to anger & bargaining until we reach the moment of acceptance, we travel from that place of wilderness where nothing satisfies our drooping spirits to coming home to that place of peace where we experience a deep sense of "God-is-with-us." It is the journey where I learn to leave behind the Pharisaical attitude that "I am self sufficient" & able to go to that place where I hear the Lord's invitation to adopt the heart of the Publican who realised his deep need for God. It is a pilgrim journey that is deeply blessed.

"the pilgrims paused on the ancient stone in the mountain gap.
behind them stretched the roadway they had travelled.
already a far journey..was it a lifetime?
ahead, mist hid the track.
unspoken the questions hovered.
why go on?..is life not short enough?
why seek to pierce its mystery?
why venture further on strange paths, risking all?
surely that is a gamble for fools..or lovers.
why not return by the known road?
why be a pilgrim still?..

a voice they knew called to them saying;
this is Trasná, the crossing place..
choose! go back if you must,
you will find your life easily by yesterday's road.
you can pitch your tent by yesterday's fires.
there may be life in the embers yet.
if that is not your deepest desire, stand still.
lay down your load.
take your life in your two hands,
[gently..you are trusted with something precious]
while you search your heart's yearnings;
what am I seeking? What is my quest?
when your star rises deep within,

you will have light for your steps.
..this is Trasná, the crossing place. Choose!
..this is Trasná, the crossing place. Come!"

[Sr Raphael Considine PBVM]

Advent

Isaiah says "prepare the way of the Lord"
but that's not all of it.
He says "in the desert prepare the way of the Lord"
where is the desert in our town?
where is the desert in our parish?
where is the desert in my own family?
where is the desert in my heart?

What is a desert?
what words describe one?
hot, barren, empty, lonesome, fearsome.
The desert is where no one can live for long,
where not much grows,
where we become uncomfortable and want to leave.

The desert through which we must prepare the Lord's way
is not in the Holy Land, not in Bethlehem.
It is here in our town, in our parish,
beginning with our own hearts.

Jesus has come.
He is here with us.
And so, for Advent to be a time of welcoming,
we must invite Him where He's never been..
The barren, empty, lifeless spot in our lives
where we've never let Him in before.
The desert is the corner of our heart where we are uneasy,
where it hurts.
It is the corner that needs Christmas badly..
healing,
and the touch of Jesus' love.

Let's look at our hearts..the beautiful places there,
the loving feelings, the forgiving moments,
the unselfish giving.

And let's keep looking beyond all the wonderful things
[and there are many]
and try to find that one spot, however small and insignificant,
where Jesus has not been,
where we have allowed him no access.
It is that part of our heart we've forgotten about

or we've jealously guarded saying "No! I won't change that!
No one will get in there!"
It is the only place where we can really celebrate Christmas
..where it has never been celebrated before.

"in the desert prepare the way of the Lord"

first we have to find the desert.
we have to find that one last spot
which is shielded from love, which is
protected from what Jesus might ask.

It is that place in our heart, in our life, where we say;
"yes Jesus you can have everything but..
I'll love everyone except..
I'll be generous until..
I'll forgive if.."

The desert puts limits on our love and hinders our growing.
Perhaps our desert is the way we treat someone close to us,
or a failure to use our talents.
Maybe it's a grudge we hold and refuse to let go.
Maybe it's a corner of our heart where way down
we don't really like ourselves.

We have to look hard to discover
the personal desert within us that
is denying admittance to Christmas.
Christmas is not so much for children as for those who have
grown enough to realise that
Christmas can happen in a way it never has before.
We have only to find our desert and prepare the way of the Lord
for his coming.

His coming..His Advent..depends on our invitation..our welcome.
What is more exciting than to be invited to go someplace
You've never been before.
He'll love it!
And his love will turn our deserts into oases...

[“the Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of all in us that is not yet Christ..”]
Thomas Merton

Nottingham University Feedback

Nottingham University Cassoc
Retreat ; 3-5 February 2006

Session 3. “..with the baby in the background..”

[Lectio divina on Geburt Christi ; Bicci de Lorenzo ; Florence 1373-1452]

..[infant Jesus] ..caterpillar .wrapped up..
first thing focus on..Jesus in middle
whiteness purity
star on Marys shoulder
Marys black cloak..death

Josephs expression..	concerned	hopeless
	defeated	tense
	worried	apathetic
	lonely	agony
	sense of loss	tired
	uncertain	“trying to distance himself from Mary”
	grim	
	trapped	
	anxious	
	sorrow	

Marys expression.. serene [acceptance..submission]
“opposite to everything in Josephs face..”
concerned
mother & child “looking right through him”
standard Mary face..[of icons]
connection of Marys’ eyes to Jesus’ eyes
doesn’t seem worried
Mary / Joseph “invisible barrier” she is anxious to break barrier

full of compassion
mothers face bright & light
she is almost like an angel appearing to Joseph
reflective..mindful
graceful..praying hands..gentle
gaze of thankfulness to Joseph for all his sacrifices
trusting in people

The painting speaks to me of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The baby Jesus lies in the centre ; below represents his death and above his rising to new life. The expression of grief and loss on the face of Joseph, along with the black cloak of Mary, the colour of mourning, alludes to the crucifixion. In the upper section of the painting the shepherds look up to the resurrected Jesus, his resurrection symbolised by the empty cave [or tomb?]. Mary stands across the whole painting, uniting the two events of the Easter story. Her face is drawn above the baby Jesus. Although there can be seen hints of her sorrow at the crucifixion, she also reflects the hope and expectation of the resurrection.

[Nottingham Univ Cassoc ; 3-5 Feb 2006]

Poem

after a while you learn the subtle difference
between holding a hand and chaining a soul,
and you learn that love doesn't mean leaning
and company doesn't mean security.
And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts
and presents aren't promises..
and you begin to accept your defeats
with your head up and your eyes open
and with the grace of an adult, not the
grief of a child.
And you learn to build all your roads on today
because tomorrows ground is too uncertain
for your plans.
After a while you learn that even sunshine
burns if you get too much.
So plant your own garden and decorate
your own soul..instead of waiting for
someone to bring you flowers.
And you will learn that you really can endure,
that you are special
and that you really do have worth.
So live to learn and know yourself.
In doing so, you will learn to live.

[Learning ; Veronica A. Shoffstall]