

Sermon

Saint Peter's Brighton Beach

Patronal Festival 2022

Winter is a period of the year when we set aside time to reflect on our spiritual journey. It is a time to slow down. A time to stop and take notice of what matters. In winter, we take a deep breath and focus on what has been right in front of us all the time but, most days, goes unnoticed. Winter is a time of turning. We turn from that which merely distracts and occupies us to that which enriches and inspires us. From the mundane to the sacred. *From the prosaic to the poetic.*

In winter we slow down to the heart's time. In Winter, we seek to draw near to the mystery of the cross. But our attempts at explanation and analysis will never be adequate to this task. We must go deeper. We must move, from the head, to the heart.

In her book, 'The heart's time,' Anglican author Janet Morley suggests that to do this we need to

turn aside from the [world around us] in order to reflect; to notice what is going on, to detect what is really significant. It is to attend properly to what seems insignificant and might otherwise be missed, but is actually indicative of the whole direction of our unconscious priorities – so that these can be

reconsidered. It is consciously to take a slice out of our life, so as to understand how we use our life in this world overall.

In his poem, *The Bright Field*, the Reverend Ronald Thomas writes, of the crucifixion:

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.'

In the northern hemisphere, at the beginning of Lent, the weather is still wintry. The trees and bushes are bare. And yet the feeling is not one of sadness. It is not sombre. To the contrary. The feeling, is one

of wonder. The feeling, is one of joy. In her poem, Lent, Jean Watt writes of this joy, at the crucifixion of Jesus:

Lent is a tree without blossom, without leaf,
Barer than blackthorn in its winter sleep,
All unadorned. Unlike Christmas which decrees
The setting-up, the dressing-up of trees,
Lent is a taking down, a stripping bare,
A starkness after all has been withdrawn
Of surplus and superfluous,
Leaving no hiding place, only an emptiness
Between black branches, a most precious space
Before the leaf, before the time of flowers;
Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,
Lest we should miss the stars.

The crucifixion of Jesus, is an event, not of sorrow, but of joy. In the crucifixion of Jesus, we see the very face of God. In Jesus Christ, and him crucified, God has shown himself to the world. The game of hide and seek is over. God has made himself known to the world.

In the crucifixion of Jesus, we see the stars. We see the face of God. We see, the mercy of God. In the crucifixion of Jesus, we are seen by God. The face of God, smiles upon us. We are smiled upon, by infinite mercy. We are seen, by God.

We are seen, as we truly are.

A starkness after all has been withdrawn
Of surplus and superfluous,
Leaving no hiding place, only an emptiness
Between black branches, a most precious space
Before the leaf, before the time of flowers;
Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,
Lest we should miss the stars.

I have seen the stars break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realise now
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And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

After receiving communion, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" Jesus is asking Peter, 'Do you love me, Jesus, more than every other thing in the world?' Peter said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep'. Before concluding, "Follow me.