

Along the track

Hanrahan

As I write this, we have been enjoying a beautiful day – no wind, a clear sky and, unexpectedly for this time of the year, around twenty degrees. So I went for a walk, as did many others. It was so interesting to greet others with ‘What a beautiful day’ and the most common response was ‘Yes, but it is not going to last!’ or ‘But it’s going to rain tomorrow!’ ‘Winter is on the way!’

I wonder why we don’t just rejoice in the present sometimes, why we don’t take the present moment as a gift, which is what it is meant to be.

If you have never read John O’Brien’s poem, *Said Hanrahan*, a treat is in store. If you do know it, it is worth reading it again. Hanrahan expresses unconquerable Irish pessimism about the prospects down on the farm. The poem describes the recurrent natural cycle of droughts, floods and bushfires in rural Australia as seen by ‘Hanrahan’. No matter what happened, ‘we’ll all be rooned’, said Hanrahan in accents most forlorn, outside the church ere Mass began one frosty morn.

In good times and in bad, we can meet some people who steadfastly see the down side. Sometimes they can bring a touch of realism to a situation but more often than not, they can be hard to work with. I suppose that has a lot to do with personality types, but often seeing the down side can come from past experiences - disappointments, hurtful criticism, having our ideas scorned, events or people who have stymied our creative thinking, fear of change.

On the other hand, we have all received the gifts of the Spirit in equal measure. One of the greatest of these is the gift of Wisdom. It is usually at the top of the list of the gifts of the Spirit and it is closely linked with the love and generosity of God. Among other things, wisdom helps us to come to some appreciation of the graces so generously given to us and to others. It helps us to discern God’s presence and purpose in the situations we find ourselves in throughout life. Both St Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine wrote that the gift of wisdom allows us ‘to see with the eyes of God’ – in other words, to see ourselves as God sees us, to see others as God sees them and to see the world as God sees the world. Now that’s a gift!! But we have to work at it – just like getting a bike, we have to learn how to ride it. We have to develop the skills and keep using them. Ever tried to get on a bike after years of absence? It takes a bit of doing.

Developing the Gift of Wisdom asks us to use imagination – it asks us to dream, to vision a better way. If we have a pessimistic orientation, that can be a tough call. In the novel *David Copperfield*, Dickens wrote:

I learned that there were two ways I could live my life: following my dreams or doing something else. Dreams aren't a matter of chance, but a matter of choice. When I dream, I believe I am rehearsing my future.'

Following dreams, imagining is not a matter of fantasy, of escaping from reality. Imagination is a creative faculty we all have. It is life giving rather than avoiding reality. It does help us ‘rehearse our future’, just take St Augustine as an example. In one of his many great insights, Augustine described with painful intensity his struggle to choose the life which he had become convinced was the right one, yet not being able to reject old ways. He discovered he was unable to just ‘will’ the change. He knew what he ought to do and, on some level he wanted to do it. But, as he puts it, his will was divided. There was no use, Augustine said, in exhorting him to change his life. He already knew that – you could not shame him to change as he was already crushed by shame. He had to be able to imagine the alternative. What would this new life look like? When he could imagine that, he finally opted for it. There is an important lesson in that.

Hoping for the best and hoping things will work out is inbuilt in all of us, but we need to give that hope much deeper roots. What do we want to happen? Like Augustine, we have to imagine what our lives might look like if we chose this or that option? If we want the Spirit’s gift of Wisdom to come alive, it’s all about making good, positive choices each day. It’s all about making a determined effort to choose what I can do well, about choosing to be positive, choosing to be encouraging and supportive of others. Rather than finding the negative, Wisdom is about looking for the presence of God in our world, in our lives, in the people and situations we encounter every day. It’s also about putting our trust in God sometimes and not always wanting to be in control – after all God has dreams and plans for us too: ‘*For I know the plans I have for you,*’ declares the LORD, ‘*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*’ (Jeremiah 29:11).

So what’s that got to do with ‘good morning’ on a walk on a sunny day? Rejoicing in and enjoying the present moment gives the gift of Wisdom a chance to work, to help transform the way we see and hear and experience things. After all, happiness is never diminished by sharing it.

And have a read of *Said Hanrahan*.

Regards
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