

Along the track

Birthdays

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. Psalm 139: 13

So it's your birthday. Another year has passed. Another year older and a new one begins. The precious gift of life ebbs away and sometimes there is often an ache within us when we look back on our lives, we carry a bit of sadness and nostalgia, perhaps even regret. Where did last year go? Where have those wonderful carefree days of childhood gone? What has happened to that part of me that could not wait for a new day because there so many things to do, so many things to discover, so many mysteries to unravel, that part of me that loved to play and laugh? What happened to that part of me that gave life to the idealism of youth, the passion to make a difference, to change the world!

Or are they still here?

They can work their magic at any decade of our lives, if we let them. There is an eternal child in all of us, who still jumps out of bed (perhaps a little slower with age), impatient for the day to begin; there is still the youthful spirit within that still wants to be a hero and save the world from evil; who still believes in romantic adventure and heroic legendary feats; who still believes that there's more to life than the boxes we find ourselves confined in over time. Given the complexity of our everyday lives we can easily lose perspective, lose the big picture. Birthdays remind us to try to live more fully inside the present moment and not let our heartaches about the past or our anxieties about tomorrow cheat us out of the riches of today. This is not just another day in your life. It's a birthday gift. God's wisdom and grace are contained in every moment of it, inviting us to live life to the full. We are called to live life to the full on every day and in every age.

But birthdays are special days. Tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions may share your special day but that doesn't take away from it being 'your day'. It is the day when we celebrate who we are, why we are. Each of us is unique, made that way by a loving and generous God. We are not here by random selection, by chance. Birthdays help us to appreciate how amazing it is to be me.

Think about how incredible it is that your ancestors met and fell in love. Some of them were born thousands of miles from each other, on other continents even. Some migrated to other countries and discovered each other. Some fell in love with the

next door neighbour. Each and every single one of your ancestors, going back generations and generations and generations had to have survived long enough to grow up, find someone they loved and then have a child, your direct ancestor. And if one – *just one* – of your ancestors living at, say, the time of Solomon or Genghis Khan, happened to have had an accident or contracted a fatal illness, or if they couldn't have kids, or if one of your prospective great, great grandfathers had decided to go elsewhere and therefore never met your great, great grandmother, then you wouldn't be here today. Think about that!

Some of your ancestors were artistic, creative, others pragmatic and practical, some were academic, others skillful and resourceful (all these are not mutually exclusive) and some of those skills, talents, temperaments, idiosyncrasies passed on to you. Out of the mix comes you, your skills, abilities, talents.

Not only that, your eyes, your nose, the shape of your face, your height, those little blemishes can be traced back to an ancestor. When you were born, people were already saying "Doesn't he/she look like...!"

On birthdays we look over the past year and ask what have you done? Perhaps it is better to ask 'who have you been?' and 'who do you want to be?' It's not too late to dream, to change tack or to rejoice in the gifts of who and what you are today. It's not a bad idea to take a moment on this day to reflect on how others see you too.

So, here's to being alive. It's easy to feel small and insignificant. But you are not. You are, in the words of King David, fearfully and wonderfully made! (Psalm 139). Birthdays remind us to love and respect our self. They remind us to celebrate all that is wonderful in our life, our achievements of the last year and our goals and dreams for the next. No birthday is ever the same; there is a richness in each year and a welcoming invitation to the next.

As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart. Proverbs 27:19

Now that's something to think about.

Regards
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