

Along the track

The Gift of Imagination

It is a delight to spend time with small children. Sometimes it seems as if their imagination knows no limits. They can see heroes or monsters or all things magic, even in the most mundane. Books and films which explore and stretch children's imagination (and our own) have become popular again in recent years. We can think of imagination as something for kids, an optional extra as it were, but it is a precious and enduring gift from God for people of all ages.

Sometimes we equate the use of imagination with pretending or just fantasy, but imagination offers us much more than that. Imaginative play, for example, helps children interpret the world around them. It helps them walk in another's shoes as they create a variety of roles and situations, to imagine what it is like to be brave, adventurous, to make great changes. Imagining what might be is an important part of learning to make decisions. Imagination helps them and us see things differently and envision new possibilities.

Science fiction may stretch the imagination at times as it usually deals with worlds that differ from our own as the result of new scientific discoveries, new technologies, or different social systems. It explores the consequences of such change, so science fiction considers questions regarding the impact and possibilities of science itself, politics, sociology, as well as questions of morality and about the kind of future we want. And don't want. While science fiction may appear to be a journey into unreality, it calls us to respond to the world as it is, to treasure what is right, what is positive and uplifting and calls us to work to change what is destructive of human nature, of freedom, of our basic rights. It also calls on us to envision a better world. Imagination is not just child's play; imagination is what inspires people of all ages to use their creative gifts to surround themselves with beauty, to design new technologies that make life not only easier but fairer, more just, more healthy, to visualise ways to live in peace with one another.

Great discoveries began in the imagination of someone who dreamed of a better way, a better solution to this problem, to this way of doing things. When we are stuck, lacking inspiration or a way forward, it is usually because we can't see past our current situation, we cannot imagine new possibilities. Sometimes we are so stuck in one way of doing things that we cannot imagine what might be, we cannot imagine another way. In a survey

across literally thousands of businesses in the US, the most successful businesses were found to be those characterised by a few positive traits: using resources effectively and efficiently, having a strong customer focus, and organisational capability. But companies with the imagination to continually create new methods and products survived and prospered for much longer.

This gift of imagination has been given to us by God. It is part of who we are and who we are called to be. It can call us to be better than we thought we might be, it can help us to envisage better ways, new possibilities, 'to dream things that never were'. Jesus used imagination often – he told stories that asked his listeners to imagine what God's kingdom might look like in the here and now.

Imagination can draw us closer to God. From earliest times through a variety of art forms, the imagination was a resource for prayer. The psalms were filled with wonder about the world and how it revealed the mystery of God who gave us our very being and all that we have. They sang of the wonders and complexities of our human experience how we could find God's hand in them. They sang of the beauty of creation and how, if we were open to it, we could experience God's love reaching out to us. Later on, icons, stained-glass windows, statues, music, movement, and dance inspired our imaginations and inspired us to worship and pray. They have called us out of the ordinary, out of the mundane, to lift up our minds and hearts, they have helped us to touch our spirits, to imagine new ways, new possibilities, new discoveries about the God who loves us dearly.

Sometimes we are so concerned with what we don't have, we can't see what we do have and what we can do with it. If we focus on the negative, having an "I can't" attitude we won't achieve much. What possibilities might we see if only we let our imaginations get to work; in our own lives, in our parishes and in our institutions we need courage, imagination and a willingness to try new ways, new ideas, new plans. If we are to respond to our world and its needs today, we cannot just accept the status quo, to do what we have always done. It is not working. It calls us to imagine a better way, new ways of living the Good News.

Regards
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