AGAPE - COMMUNION – (Thoughts into Silence.)

In my years as Mental Health Chaplain some of the most moving moments were Sunday mornings in Chapel… people coming to the Communion Rail not crippled physically but arguably worse than that…. crippled inside so no one could see their disability... yet they came knowing their need…

In this place of brokenness, I was so often amazed at their knowledge and faith in God… Frank, from the Acquired Brain Injuries Unit, always made a bee-line for me… he knew his Bible and he liked to test my knowledge… it was a game… “Jesus was good wasn’t he?” he said to me one day. ‘Yes Frank, he was good.’ “Never did anything wrong did he?” ‘No Frank, he was a good man.’ Then came the twinkle in his eye as he delivered his Coup de Gras… “He nicked a donkey once!”

Chris comes dashing in early, genuflecting and rushing up to me pressing a £20.00 note into my hand… “Here Lance, it’s for the collection!” ‘No, no Chris I say to him, we don’t really have a collection in the hospital.’ “Oh but you must have it” he insists. ‘Why?’ I ask him. “Well, I pinched it out of the candle stand last week, and I want to give it back!”

Mike is scribbling in the visitors book, filling page after page with scrawl, big meaningless scribbles all over the pages I had just replenished from last weeks session… I was getting a tad irritated… he noticed me watching. Here Lance, can you read this…?. No, I said still feeling irritated. Mike stops scribbling for a moment and looks at me earnestly. “No, but God can!” He says, and goes and sits in the pew… and I am left feeling stupid and sad.

During communion a young single parent Mum comes to receive with a toddler in her arms… lifting the host up to her as her arms are full of squirming child, I’m transfixed as the little one becomes still, his eyes fixed on the host…. I’m thinking He’s going to grab this… but he doesn’t, he leans forward and blows at the wafer… as if blowing out a candle on a birthday cake. What has he seen? I ask myself… a flame? What is it that captivated him that I can’t see… A Pentecostal fire?

To me all these are grace filled moments full of mystery and full of presence…

So, do I really understand what happens at the consecration? No, I’ve no idea. Yes I could give you a theological reflection and summation… but perhaps I am more informed by what I see in those who are present, those who come with no ego, or “Just as I am” as the Hymn says.” Perhaps at these moments I find Christ not so much in the bread, but in the faces out there before me. The Christ to be resembled is there… Scribbling Mike is Christ, Chris the repentant borrower from the candle-stand, Frank the Pharisee with a sense of fun… and the Christ child that blows at the flame that is The Advocate, The Comforter and Guide who dances on the bread held in my unworthy fingers.

In the same Hospital we had a Rabbi from the Jewish Reform on a training placement… Her name was Irit… her mother lived in Jerusalem… she lived in London and invited me to her home for a meal as a thankyou… I had no idea what the food was, I had no idea what the Hebrew prayers were, beautiful as they sounded. I had no idea why and when the candles were lit or what for… but it didn’t matter… we shared and we knew that the moment was sacred... and we were both blessed by it.

Life in Solitude is teaching me what really matters… Today it’s to share the simplest meal… bread and wine, an intimate moment with friends… an agape moment… and yet also a communion of souls… a love offering… So I might say to you what Isaiah wrote… “Come all of you who are thirsty, come you who have no money, buy and eat” I don’t mind what you are or what you believe… share this wonderful moment of togetherness and be blessed by each other’s presence. Or I might simply say, with St Augustine who wore no vestments and had no taste for pomp, “Receive that which you are.” X 2

So, we may observe only bread and wine, or we might glimpse a small flickering flame and want to blow it out… or we may taste and see the goodness of the Lord… it matters not. For, as with Irit, in this agape moment it’s the sharing that is important, it is indeed ‘Love passed on’ and everything imparts His Grace. Shalom. Amen…

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