Sacred Space

1. TRINITY (thoughts into silence)

Although I’ve been an Anglican all my life, my father, wanting to give me a good education, sent me to a Roman Catholic Salesian College where I was soon taught the Catechism and enjoyed debates on what happened to us poor protestants that died without converting to the one true faith!! I learned that the ‘get out of jail free card’ was to kiss the crucifix three times just before you died… so the question naturally arose, ‘What if you only managed twice!?’ ….And then of course there was mystery of The Trinity, how ***does*** three go into one? Well, in Maths, we learned that it doesn’t… so the stock answer from the very Irish Brother Michael Delmer was the Shamrock… and, at 12 years of age, that was enough to keep us quiet.

Years later, then, the Trinity still demands questions and a coherent explanation. Not easy, even for St Augustine. I like the apocryphal story of St Augustine walking on the beach and noticing a young boy running down to the sea with a spoon, ladling up the salt water and taking it back up the sand-dune to pour it down a small hole he found there. This was repeated several times until Augustine asked the boy what he was doing. The boy replied, “I’m putting the sea into this hole.” Augustine said, “You silly boy, you’ll never get the whole ocean into that small hole.” To which the boy replied, “No, and you’ll never work out the Trinity!” And promptly disappeared!

What I’ve now come to know is that although God is mystery… he is also infinitely knowable and that if we keep searching, new and deeper answers are always being revealed to us… because our spirituality along with the whole of nature, and not least our consciousness, is still evolving.

So, as St Paul wrote, “Now I have done away with childish things…” The Shamrock has long gone… and I have a new understanding. Trinity has delivered to me a new word, Perichoresis. ‘Peri’ meaning around, and ‘Choresis’ from the same root as Choreography. It is, if you like, a Divine Circle Dance. But it explains more than this… for in this dance the participants, like the waterwheel on an Old Mill, pour themselves one into the other causing creative energy and movement… and there is even more to it than just that… because for this movement to happen it requires that each one must empty itself completely into the other… in total self-giving.

Now you will all know of the beautiful Rublev Icon known as the Trinity… with the three figures sat around a table.

And you may have noticed that in the front of the table there appears to be a small drawer… it looks a little like a letter-box There have been a number of ideas as to what this drawer exactly represents and iconographers have made a few suggestions of their own… but recently the art experts have had a much closer look at the original Rublev Icon and the so called ‘drawer’… Analysing what they thought was paint on the drawer, they found that it was not paint at all… in fact it was found to be a type of resinous glue…

So, originally, what might have been attached to the Icon by this glue…? Well, the historians did their investigations and it’s thought that most likely it was a mirror. And it makes sense… Icons with their kind of reverse perspective draw us into their story… This Icon, using a mirror, brings our own image right into the Icon itself and therefore we become part of the story, we become a fourth person in the Trinity, invited into the Cosmic Dance to participate in the giving and receiving of this outpouring of love…

In scripture we read of the same outpouring where we’re told that Jesus empties himself… this is Paul writing of this Kenosis in Philippians 2: 9-16)

Another image might be of a candle burning down, giving of itself in its giving of light.

At our hermitage silence is the space we offer where Centring Prayer becomes a simple bare gesture of giving oneself away… to make space for the Other…

**So, likewise our, ‘Thought into Silence’ this evening comes from Psalm 46 … ‘Be still and know that I am God’ …** By repeating and reducing this phrase eventually we are left with silence and God… to pour out whatever he chooses to offer us this day… So…

Be still and know that I am God…

Be still and know that I am…

Be still and know…

Be still…

Be…

######  The Trinity. Andrei Rublev (1370-1430). Moscow.

Lance Blake MA TSSF (Fenland Hermitage)

AHPCC Conference Chaplain 2016

2. THE MANSION (thoughts intsilence)

“What’s it all about Alfie?” Is the question that you and I have probably heard a thousand times from our hospice and hospital patients… So how do we explain the Meaning of Life beyond ‘42’, the answer given in The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy! And if we’re honest how do we explain it to ourselves unless we can begin recognise the Divine in the ordinary and in our own fragility… and unless we are awakened and begin to experience things are the *really* are.

Yes there are special moments in life, as in holding a new born baby, or at the other end of life, at the bedside of a dying friend or relative.

Then there are moments which are inexplicably much more than that… we experience, the taste, the shimmering, and the touch of The Other. But these are the moments that come fleetingly… we’ve all had them… something special happens but it fades all too quickly or it was so subtle that we almost missed it altogether… they becomes a questionable memory, as when we’ve glimpsed something out of the corner of our eye…

Somehow we know these moments of truth, yet we are not fully able enter them, and we ask ourselves this question…. “Why do we spend so many of our waking hours living on the outer circumference of the inner richness that is this life we lead?” We know its truth… but somehow our access to it is closed off… Now here’s the picture…!

The image is this: You have inherited an elaborately decorated mansion and during the first week you invite your relatives to come and see… the only problem is that you don’t have the key, and so you’re living in a tent in the back garden!... Now, after the bar-b-que you say to them, ‘Would you like to see the place?’….and they say, ‘Oh yes, we’d love to!’

So you take them across to look through the leaded windows saying, ‘Well here’s the kitchen, and if you look through these French doors you can see the lounge and in the next bay you can see the library… Oh and wait a minute, I’ll get a ladder and I’ll show you the bedrooms! And they say admiringly, ‘You really do have a stunning place here.’ And you humbly reply, ‘Well, I like it!’…. but all the time you’re just living in the tent!

**Now**, imagine that you’ve actually lived your whole life ***IN*** this beautiful mansion, but through some tragic condition you believe you’re living in a tent in the back garden…

… and every week your therapist says to you, ‘YOU’RE IN THE MANSION!’ trust me, I know..! You ARE! And you say, ‘No, no… I’m really not worthy to live there and I don’t even deserve to consider how I might get in there.

Do you see what happens to us? What we want is a habituated experience of Reality but we are, so often, covered and drowning in our superficiality or we are hypnotised by it!

Yet, every breath and heartbeat is God infinitely giving himself away constantly and inexplicably… The measure of God’s love is His ability to give himself totally…

“So, why do I spend so many of my waking hours trapped on the outer circumference of the inner richness that is this life I lead?” What *is* it all about?

Thomas Merton Writes this…“What is serious to men is often very trivial in the sight of God. If we could let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious dance.

We do not have to go very far to catch echoes of that game, and of that dancing. When we are alone on a starlit night; when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat; when we see children in a moment when they are really children; when we know love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet Bashō we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary plop --at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the "newness," the emptiness and the purity of vision that make themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance.

For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyse them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, then the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair.

But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things; or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

From Thomas Merton’s – New Seeds of Contemplation.

The invitation to contemplative living in our ordinary life is indeed finding the Pearl of Great Price even in our own frailty. It holds us until finally we know what we know and stand by what we can’t explain.

So our thought into Silence is this:

‘Can we sit so still that we can sense God inviting each of us into the Cosmic dance.’

Lance Blake MA TSSF (Fenland Hermitage) AHPCC Conference Chaplain… 2016

THE YAHWEH PRAYER – (Thought into Silence)

In exploring silence during our conference of many words, I’d like to share with you The Yahweh Prayer…

It’s a mystery, which is both Foundation and Abyss… so, something you fall into…

So, mystery doesn’t mean you can’t understand it, only that you can’t pigeon hole it, like the mystique of a person, so as it draws us deeper it actually becomes ever more knowable.

For the contemplative it’s a practice, which I hope may become your own practice, in that it may become an experiential knowing…

The explanation of The Yahweh Prayer came from a conference some 6 years ago or so between scientists and religious when on the second session of the second day, a scientist who was also a Rabbi said, “You know, you Christians never really understood the translation, ‘Do not take the name of God in vain…’” It’s not really about *not* saying, ‘God Dammit’ which, of course, I hope you don’t! But in fact it’s saying that *any* use of the sacred word ‘Yahweh’ was in vain… Even to speak it was vanity! Because it really is a mystery that must lead you into this abyss of awe and wonder. You see, it was never to be spoken with your lips or your mouth which is why Elohim and Adonai became more commonly used.

Then the Rabbi said this, ‘Did you know that to correctly pronounce the consonants of the sacred name, you do not use your lips or move your tongue? In fact **it** **cannot be spoken… it can only be breathed!** An Inhalation and an exhalation…

And he demonstrated this… Yah… weh. Yah… weh. Yah… weh.

So, think for a moment… The first word you ever spoke when you left your Mother’s body was the name of God. It was the first word you said when you woke up this morning. In fact we’re speaking it right now… not just us in this room but all six billion of us on this planet… whatever our religion, stance or belief system…

The same is true for our patients, their families and indeed ourselves as hospice and hospital chaplains. Remember, the very last word we will ever speak on this earth will also be the name of God… And all we can do is bring this to consciousness.

**So, Our Thought into Silence is just that…**

Become aware of our breath… for each breath is God, breathing us into and holding us into Being… and the first and last breath we will ever say on earth… is the name of God.

Shalom!

Lance Blake MA TSSF (The Fenland Hermitage). AHPCC Conference Chaplain 2016

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 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 week’s 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…

Lance Blake MA TSSF (The Fenland Hermitage) AHPCC Conference Chaplain 2016

2016 AHPCC Conference Prayers

Each of us will face some changes during the coming year… maybe in our personal life… perhaps in our churches and places of worship. Almost certainly in our hospices and hospitals as we watch, wait and wonder at the more drastic changes to others’ lives… So we offer this prayer for all those facing change and for ourselves:

## A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO FACE CHANGE.

“Lord, comfortable and well-worn are my daily paths whose edges have grown grey with constant use. My daily speech is a collection of old words worn down at the heels by repeated use. My language and deeds, addicted to habit, prefer the taste of old wine, the feel of weathered skin.

Come awaken me, Spirit of the new; Come refresh me, creator of green life. Come inspire me, Risen Son, you who make all things new: I am too young to be dead, to be stagnant in spirit.

High are the walls that guard the old, the tired secure ways of yesterday, that protect me from the feared heresy of change. For all change is a danger to the trusted order, the threadbare traditions that are maintained by the narrow ruts of rituals.

Yet how can an everlastingly new covenant retain its freshness and vitality without injections of the new, the daring and untried?

Come, O you who are ever new; wrap my heart in a new skin, ever flexible to be reformed by your Spirit. Set my feet to fresh paths this day; inspire me to speak original and life giving words creatively to give shape to the new.

Come and teach me how to dance with delight whenever you send a new melody my way. Amen.”

## Final Blessing:

May your prayers of listening deepen enough to hear in the depths the laughter of God.

May all that is unforgiven in you be released.

May your fears yield to your deepest tranquillity

and may all that is unlived in you blossom into a future graced with love. Amen.

Lance Blake MA TSSF, (The Fenland Hermitage) AHPCC Conference chaplain 2016

Sacred Space Music

Several people have asked for copies of Lance’s Sacred Space Meditations, and also the details of the music that he used.

###### ‘Blest are They’ – Best of David Hass Vol 1.

Track 2 'Now we remain'

Track 12 'Prayer for peace'

###### ‘Mane Nobiscum’ – Taize.

Track 4 ‘See, I am near’

Track 9 ‘Kyrie’

Track 15 ‘Mane Nobiscum’

Track 18 ‘Nunc Dimittis’