

Pentecost 5 2025 All Souls' **CELEBRATION AND TRANSFORMATION** dtw

Col 1, 9-10...we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.

A contemporary parable tells of a philosophy professor who stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with small rocks. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was. So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles of course rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The students laughed while the professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

"Now", said the professor, "I want you to recognise that this is your life. The rocks are the important things – your family, your partner, your health, your children – things that if everything was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else – the superficial stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the superficial stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and empty the rubbish. Take care of the rocks first – the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

But then... a student took the jar which all the other students and the professor agreed was full, and proceeded to pour in a glass of wine. Of course the wine filled the remaining space making the jar truly full. And the moral of the tale...? No matter how full your life is, there is always room for celebration!

Saint Irenaeus, in the second century, wrote, 'The Glory of God is a human being fully alive'. Do *you* feel fully alive? Some years ago now, at a Clergy Conference, Bishop Stephen Pickard invited us to ask a quite arresting personal and spiritual question of ourselves: "Is the life I'm living the life that wants to live in me?" I'm now inviting you to ask that question of yourself and I'll give you some silent moments to ponder it. "Is the life I'm living the life that wants to live in me?" (Silence)

Spiritual Transformation has to do with the whole of life, living and moving and being in God. Baron Friedrich von Hugel called it 'the deepest experience of the deepest fact'; John Macquarrie saw it as a 'process of becoming a human being in the fullest sense'; Geoffrey Wainwright, a 'combination of praying and living'; Alan Jones, 'the art of making connections'. We are called to a life lived out as deeply and as fully as possible, searching for meaning, living creatively with our unanswered questions, and reflecting on the totality of the human experience. In biblical and Christian terms, ours is to be a graced response to the gift and initiative of God. Spirituality involves the

exploration and articulation of what Jesus meant by “abundant life”. (John 10.10) To be fully alive is in the first place to be fully present with God, with others, and to be self-aware. “Who am I?” can be a frightening question for some people. “Here am I” can be an expression of humble but confident offering and surrender to a higher purpose and glory. How sad to have toiled and laboured for years and years, never to have truly seen the blue sky and captured the rapture of God’s reign on earth as it is in heaven.

Real celebration is the opposite of contemporary consumerism. Some people never celebrate anything – they have no time. There are few surprises. No surprise is allowed to interfere with the onerous burden of endurance, commitment, achievement and accumulation. Yet, other people are wonderful at celebrating. When we celebrate we joyfully acknowledge and recognise the presence of some person, thing or achievement that delights us. Longing is no longer directed towards an anticipated future. Celebration is a *now*-event. It seems to me that Jesus of Nazareth was so present to the *present* – the now – knowing the blessings and gifts that were around him – around you – around me. On the other hand, we find his disciples so often preoccupied with superficial things like bread, status, success and a prosperous messianic future - driven, like Martha, rather than drawn, like Mary. Which do we choose in life: to be driven or drawn?

The Irish author on Celtic spirituality, John O’Donohue, writes, “When you celebrate you are taking the time to recognise, to open your eyes and behold in your life the quiet miracles and gifts that seek no attention; yet each day they nourish, shelter and animate your life.” Conversely, for those distracted by the claims of this world, John Lennon sang, “Life is what happens while you’re busy making other plans”. The turbo-motor within the pre-occupied, driven spirit, ensures that enough is never enough, and distraction with the elusive tomorrow always kills the presence of today.

Functionalist thinking impoverishes presence – impoverishes imagination, wonder and delight. The functionalist mind is committed to maintenance and efficiency. The priority is that things continue to work or work better. In professional lives, people often experience this. However, functionalism and consumerism must be heavily balanced by a sense of reverence. Without reverence there is no sense of presence or wonder. And this is where my text from today’s reading from Colossians comes in, *that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God*. Christians are called to share this wonderful and liberating mystery with others who may be caught up in the obsessions of life, that they too may join this quest and celebration.

God has been rich toward us: each day that is given us is full of the graciousness of divine betrothal. And here we are on *this* day, the Lord’s Day, another new beginning, and a chance to be rich toward God. And we are blessed – for though our lives may be full-on, jam-packed perhaps, there is still room. For we have chosen the better part, to come into the nearer presence of the Christ who makes his home with us, and we break bread together – the bread of life, and we drink wine – the cup of everlasting salvation.