

INDWELLING GOD

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At times we can all feel overwhelmed by life. However outwardly blessed our lives might seem - we have food and shelter, jobs, homes, and family - we can sometimes, each and every one of us, feel alone, lost and fearful. We all know that feeling; that sense that, “nobody quite understands what I am going through”.

This sensation, of personal isolation, is particularly present in anyone who has suffered from depression, especially since depression is a mental state which many people don't understand. There is are no major outward physical symptoms, no crutches or bandages, no operations involved - even though the physical symptoms for those suffering can be highly acute and deeply painful.

Like any other organ of your body, your brain can go wrong, but unlike other organs the brain is extraordinarily complex and even top neurologists have limited understanding of how it truly operates.

A very dear friend of mine called Rachel Kelly last week published her extremely brave book called “Black Rainbow”, which charts her personal account of her fight to overcome depression. The memoir is brilliantly and beautifully written (she was a journalist for the Times). Black Rainbow explains how Rachel started her journey of recovery through the power of poetry, prayer and breathing. These three elements poetry, prayer and deep breathing became like “ice cool water offered to a parched traveler” in Rachel's darkest and blackest moments.

One of the poems/prayers she found most comforting was that of St Teresa of Avila. Rachel says that repeating the prayer over and over again became like a mantra to her.

*Let nothing disturb thee,
Nothing affright thee
All things are passing;
God never changeth;
Patient endurance
Attaineth to all things;
Who God possesseth
In nothing is wanting;
Alone God sufficeth.*

But Rachel also found great comfort in something extremely simple: something all of us do every day - breathing. She learnt a breathing technique similar to the ancient Hindu technique of Pranayama which led to a great realization that one's breath can be a constant companion.

“Its impossible for your mind to tense when your body is relaxed by lengthening the breath” writes Rachel, “You can slow the heart rate and enjoy the after glow as the muscles relax. Later I was struck by the thought that actually I did not need to feel alone, I could imagine my breathing like a companion, and my breath would never leave me until the day I died”.

And of course breathing is something every human being on earth share. It is our very life force. When God created Adam, God breathed into him the breath of life. As a result Adam became a living human being:

“Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”. (Genesis 2:7)

And in today’s Gospel for the first time, John points to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The term Holy Spirit comes from the Hebrew word “rooach” which can means breath or wind.

John explains that “He lives with you and will be in you. I am in my father, you are in me and I am in you” (14:15-21). And therefore I see our very breath as the essence of our God-given spirit and the physical manifestation of the indwelling of God in each and every one of us.

In Acts this theme is also picked up by Paul as he says to the Greeks that God himself “Gives to all mortals life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:25). “For in him we live, we move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) .

An old Sufi poem called *In Each Breath* written by the mystic Sheikh Ansari Jabir Ibn (1006-1088), says “O you who have departed from your own self and who have not yet reached the Friend. Do not be sad for He (the lord) is accompanying you in each of your breaths”.

So although every one of us can feel that sense of loneliness or isolation, there is proof that we are never alone since, through our breath and very life force, we have the Holy Spirit within us: the indwelling of God.

There is another example of how each week God is dwelling in us: let us not forget we are not alone as we go forward this morning and share in the Holy Eucharist. Once more, like breath, we take into our bodies, as we partake in his Holy Sacrament, the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ who dwells in us and us in Him.

This act is a corporate one; it’s one that by sharing together binds us together. As Gavin so eloquently puts it “The Eucharist offers welcome to the lost, health to the sick, humility to the strong and transformation to all who call upon the name of God”. In this a way we cannot feel alone, but be deeply connected giving thanks to God for our communion together.

Rachel Kelly at the end of her book identified this spiritual inter- connectedness and

how it helped in her recovery. Inspired by reading Cardinal Newman's *Meditation and Devotions*, she found "There was a reason for my existence, as indeed there was to everyone, we were all links in a chain, the bond of connections between persons. It was not for me to question what had befallen me or what would befall me in the future, or to know the reason why. I had to trust in a power higher than me."

So as we prepare for Ascension and Pentecost we can understand the meaning of Jesus' words to his disciples after the resurrection in the chamber in Jerusalem when he breathes on them: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

And we now know that when God dwells within us we are no longer strangers, but friends; no longer individuals, but knitted together as one. So may we let the Spirit in, worship with wonder and awe, and know that we are never alone.

Amen.

Bibliography

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