

The Gate of the Year

As we stand at the gate of a new year, we are invited, as we step through, to put our hand into that of Another, to allow a power greater than ourselves to be at work in our lives, and to let ourselves be led to places we could never have reached on our own. It is a momentous decision to walk with this Other, to really share our life – one we discover brings immense blessings. It is beautifully expressed by a poem by Minnie Louise Haskins called: “The Gate of the Year” (a preamble to a poem she called “God knows.”)

The poem became famous when it was quoted by King George VI in his 1939 war-time Christmas broadcast to the British Empire. The words struck a powerful chord with a country facing the uncertainty of war. It still speaks to each of us in all of life’s uncertainties, promise and mystery.

And I said to the man who stood at
the gate of the year
“Give me a light that I may tread safely
into the unknown”
And he replied
“Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God
That shall be to you better than light
and safer than a known way.”
So I went forth, and finding the hand of God,
trod gladly into the night.
And He led me towards the hills
and the breaking of day in the lone East.

(Louise M. Haskins)

This is the invitation as we step into 2022 with all its uncertainty, promise and mystery – to place our hands into the hands of Another and walk with him.

Mauro Lepori, the Abbot General of the Cistercians, once said something very important about what it means to be human. He describes human beings as defined by desire, by a longing for fullness of life, a desire which is there before we even think of it, that constitutes who we are. Who we are most fundamentally, he says, is creatures of longing, a longing we cannot fulfil by ourselves.

Man is man because he does not resolve by himself the mystery of his own existence, and cannot respond alone to the question that he has within himself: “Who am I?”

(T)he thing which explains the human being, which gives him meaning, which bestows upon him his value, is greater than he is, is before him, is beyond him, is higher and deeper he is. However, it is in him: it is indissolubly bound to his person, to his humanity.”

We are made not to be alone, we are made for relationship with Another, that Other who is both within us and beyond us - God. This is beautifully expressed in the story of creation in the book of Genesis when God breathes his own spirit into clay and man becomes a living being. God is my deepest life. “It was His hands that made me and shaped me in his own image (see Psalm 118)” It is His spirit, His breath, within us, Who cries out “Abba Father.” His spirit and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God.

There are two fundamentally different ways of living life. The first is to imagine that it’s all up to you - that you are alone and so you must make sure everything will work out according to your plan. The second is to realise that you are not alone at all – in the deepest and most fundamental sense, you are not alone. You are made for relationship – with other people, but also with Another, who brought you into existence, who is the deepest part of you, whose life flows through you, who breathes life into you, who knows you better than you know yourself, who made every cell in your body, and who has an intention, a fulfilment for you, made uniquely for you, where you fit perfectly within the whole of creation.

And so you can live each day as if it is just you, all up to you to plan and to decide, to react, to respond. Or you can live with the conviction that there is Another at work in your life, someone who each day will place before you seeds of life and growth, who will bring you alive, who will gradually awaken within you all that remains to be fulfilled if you are open.

This is the choice. Either to follow a known way, hedge our bets, have everything planned for, under control, as much as we are able to do so. Or to let Another in, to let life be an adventure, a journey taken with Someone else who knows the journey ahead of us better than we do, who has a plan and intention that He wants to become real in our lives. The same invitation God gave to

Abraham and to countless millions who have come after him: “Come follow me, to the land I will show you.”

It is a very simple but profound choice. To not be alone, to let another in. The One who is already as near to you as your own breath yet as far as the farthest star, who is the mystery of your own life and says to you: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If you let me in I will share your life with you.” It is about responding to that beautiful invitation in John’s Gospel: “Make your home in me as I make mine in you.” It is the choice to be part of the vine, to let His life and His love flows through us, making our lives fruitful in ways we could never have imagined. How do we do it? Simple.

Luigi Gioia says simply: “Say it to God” - share your life with him. It’s not about being very holy or other-worldly, but about simply making him part of our real lives. Jesus in the Gospel is always bringing people back to their human experience. The Samaritan woman at the well wants to talk theology, but Jesus says: “No, tell me about your husband.” That’s when the conversation gets real! Bring your life to him as it is, speak to him and share it with him, spend time with him, listen to him. Let him in. There are millions of ways of doing it, as many as there are people – each of us is unique and so our relationship with the Lord will be unique. As Dom John Chapman once said: “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.” It’s about doing it. There’s a very simple rule about prayer that goes: “God gives the gift of prayer to those who pray.”

If you let him in and involve him in your life, your life will gradually take on a different tone and open up in new ways. If you listen to him there will be moments of insight, consolation, inspiration that will guide you along the way. If you live your life open each day to his coming to you in different ways you will begin to notice things you hadn’t noticed before, recognising the seeds of life he places in your path, the beauty before your eyes, the encounters that carry a great blessing when you welcome them. If you live trusting in and responding to the promptings of His spirit within you, you will be led to do things that will open up new doors for you and bring unexpected blessings into your life and the lives of others as God sends you to them. If you are open to the ways He challenges you will find yourself becoming a deeper, freer, more peaceful and more generous person. You will find that things start to fit together in your life in a new way, you begin to sense a guiding hand behind the “coincidences” in your life, you find you are being led on a journey and brought alive. This is the invitation we are given at the beginning of this New Year.

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