

## Holy Saturday

### Smell

“..imagine breathing a stranger in..”

In his Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” [ the Joy of the Gospels ] written by Pope Francis in 2013, he talks in note 24 of “taking the first step, being involved and supportive, bearing fruit and rejoicing”

Clarissa Pinkola Estes in her poem of yesterday talks of “we are needed, that is all we can know; and though we meet resistance, we more so will meet great souls who will hail us, love us and guide us, and we will know them [ smell them? ] when they appear”

Pope Francis “the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first, and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. An evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives [ Eucharist and washing of feet of Maundy Thursday ]; it bridges distances, embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelisers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voices. An evangelising community cares for the grain and does not grow impatient with the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear.”

“smell the sheep” ...”imagine breathing a stranger in”

..from my experience in parish ministry; 20yrs in 4 different stages, two key moments to smell and to count the sheep have been at Christmas and on Easter morning..in Our Lady and St Benedict’s Ampleforth, the weekend congregation at two Masses would total 150 at best; at Christmas, with two Masses on Christmas Eve 6pm and 830pm, to cope with the demand, a 9am Mass at Gilling on Christmas morning, and a 1015am Mass in the Village, we would welcome 450 sheep into the sheepfold..pastoral ministry doesn’t come any better..”smell the sheep” and I would acknowledge and celebrate the two breeds of sheep in Catholicism coming together..one flock..the swaledales are those who come week in week out..live thrive within safety of the parish structure and the church building..protected fed watered sheared, and dependent on the local shepherd and his sheepdog..and when going gets tough brought inside to be kept warm fed and nourished..they tend to call themselves practising Catholics..always practising if not always reforming..then there are the herdicks who live out on the fells where there are no hedges or fences to contain or protect them..hardy breed grow a tough fleece rather like a doormat thick impervious to Lake District winters of rain and blizzards..fend for themselves, and have a unique sense of survival called hefting.. whilst they could roam anywhere they want on high fells thousands of acres of pasture, they have an inbuilt radar which they inherit from parents..to wander among their own flock and then, if they are tempted to go too far in the wilderness their radar like a conscience warns them they are straying too far, and they come back..they are labelled often by the swaledales

as lapsed Catholics..whereas when you meet a herdwick hear their stories and adventures in faith and in flock, when you smell them and show your appreciation of them, it becomes evident they are bearing fruit in as productive a way as their walled-in brothers and sisters..wheat and dross..rock and sand.. swaledale and herdwick.."I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me"..and when I have been away and bumped into someone who has recognised me and spoken, they will say "Fr Bede, you don't know me but I am one of your herdwicks!" brilliant.. "regarding awakened souls, there have never been more able vessels in the waters than right now across the world; they are fully provisioned [ swaledale and herdwick ] and able to signal one another as never before in the history of mankind" remember Clarissa's poem from yesterday?..

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him, said "why wasn't this ointment sold for 300 denarii, and the money given to the poor?" ...so Jesus said "leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial.."

..incense in our liturgies, the oils at the sacraments of holy orders, confirmation and the anointing of the sick, each perfumed, scented, another means of awakening and feeding the senses, making present the presence of the divine..

Last Sunday, listening to short story on R4, the writer referred to "the smell of the huge sky"..in a great book "the boy the fox the mole and the horse" by Charlie Mackesy the mole has a nose for cake..

"I've learned how to be in the present" said mole  
"how?" asked the boy  
"I find a quiet spot and shut my eyes and breathe"  
"that's good" said the boy "and then?"  
"then I focus"  
"what do you focus on?"  
"cake" said mole

"..what I have written, I have written.."

gave retreat at Ampleforth some years ago now to a group of young people from Bradford..30 of them aged between 11 and 15 preparing for Confirmation..of the 30, perhaps 25 of them wanted to be there..whilst other 5 made it clear they would have wanted to be anywhere

else..on Sat evg service of reconciliation..five monks hearing confessions..I had steady stream of youngsters until suddenly in doorway was one of five..most disruptive uninterested of lot..my heart sank..and I asked “why me?”..he sauntered into room and sat down.. I said “how do you feel?”..and waited for abuse anger retort..and he said “I’m glad I came”..and I melted..how badly wrong I had been..judged him on his attitude/body language, his tee shirt and his unkempt appearance..  
and suddenly in what he perceived/smelt to be safe space..he removed his mask..he spoke his truth..

Pilate said to Jesus..”Truth?..what is that?”

..a confessional situation..dialogue of reconciliation with Jesus..where each had perhaps made assumptions about the other on the basis of heresay..word on street.. gossip and second hand evidence..

“I came into the world for this; to bear witness to the truth, and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice”..

..a challenge..to take sides..to stand up and be counted..stand and speak out for truth..

word “reality”..or “truth”..come from Greek word “aletheia”..it means literally “that which cannot be forgotten”..

to be real..is that which can never be forgotten..truth..a truth a reality which [albeit sometimes involving hurt and pain ] sets us free..

Jesus and Pilate had much in common..leaders..each in service..neither holding ultimate authority..Jesus to his Father..Pilate to Caesar..both had been sent..under obedience.. not a responsibility either would have chosen perhaps..difficult missions..two individuals from opposite ends of spectrum of society religion background ..they meet for first time..day of judgement..prisoner and judge..[which is which?].

..the Jewish mob..fickle followers who only five days earlier had strewn palm branches in front of Jesus..acclaimed him as Messiah..were now thirsting for his death..Caiaphas their high priest saw him as a threat to his own position and future so he incited the mob.. “it is better for one man to die for the people”..genocide..ethnic cleansing..terrorism.. extermination of that “which is a threat and we want to forget”..realm of unreality .. absence of truth..

holding no delegated powers to pronounce death sentence they sent Jesus to Pilate..

Pilate astute enough to read between the lines..he goes through motions with mob ..listening to accusations..then he takes Jesus in Praetorium..his own inner sanctum where any self-respecting Jew wouldn’t be seen dead..safe space..to listen now not to unreality but to the truth..”are you the King of the Jews?”..Pilate at his incisive best.. straight to point..he would have made a good Yorkshireman..full length ball on Jesus’ middle stump..Jesus responds in kind” do you ask this of your own accord..or have others spoken to you about me?”..are you really interested in discovering the truth..or is this just overture before the motions of a puppet trial?..

truth meets truth..and the relationship..dialogue..each listening open eared open hearted to other begins here..

..as story unfolds it becomes clear there is no way out for either of them..Pilate trapped..in spite of his position the mob rule..his position..future career prospects.. final salary pension..is at risk..so, like you and I, he reluctantly goes with flow..talking the talk.."a façade of assurance without and a trembling child within" remember?..don't rock the boat..do as I say not as I do..a shadow world of unreality deception unrest sleepless nights..guilty conscience.."you too were with Jesus the Galilean"..but he [Peter] rock..and you and me..denied it saying "I do not know what you are talking about"..

the dialogue ends..and the everlasting relationship begins...with Pilates last throw of human dice.."surely you know I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?" ..and Our Lord responds in kind..in mutual respect.."you would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above.."..the power..the real power and authority you hold..to be yourself..real..truthful..sincere..comes from same source as my reservoir of truth..from Our Father..each of us wrestling in different ways with our relationship with the truth..we could make a final escape attempt..to break out..but now..this is the hour..kairos time..divine time..not 3pm on Friday 15 April 202 Good Friday chronos time..but divine time..a kairos moment prepared for since before we were born.. "before I formed you in the womb I knew you.." I was..I am..and I will always be in relationship with you..and now a moment of decision..to face the truth..my truth..

the mob persisted..intent on deception..self deception..right to end ..thirsty for a victim..obsessed with assassinating a scapegoat..[ a Paul Moore ] someone to blame as I am held captive in world of unreality..a life sentence in my invisible prison.."you should not write "King of the Jews" but "this man said. I am King of the Jews".. Pilates last recorded words were his own truth.."what I have written, I have written" ..and Jesus' own final words echo same act of faith..of relationship connectedness and fullness.."it is accomplished"..

..the truth will set you..Christ..and me..free..  
..a great escape from our prison..we are in best of company..surprising company..  
it is in the unexpected moment and in surprising company we meet the true Christ ..

..."I'm glad I came.."

..fine poem based on gospel of prodigal son where son falls into different company as according to gospel "he squandered his money on a life of debauchery..  
..poem is called "the prostitutes story"..  
..notice masks, invisible prisons, aches for relationship, and the self sacrifice as it ends..

the first time, I was caught by his young and beautiful body,  
by the shyness in his manner,  
as he lay in my arms afterwards, resting.

the second time, I noticed his accent.  
A stranger travelling far from home.

The third time he came to see me with hunger in his eyes  
and a silent desperation in the silent thrustings of his body.

The fourth time he cried like a baby missing its mother,  
and I rocked him wordlessly.  
He didn't want the sex so much as the nearness of my flesh.

The fifth time he started talking and didn't stop until he'd told me the whole  
sad tale.  
I told him "swallow your pride, go home, back where you belong.  
They'll be glad to see you, believe me."

So I sent him from me back to his own gods,  
the arms of his father, his brothers chastisement and his farm.

I was sadder than I knew to see him go.  
Not for his body, though, God knows, I'd come to love its contours and its sighs.  
It was for his friendship and trust I missed him,  
and it's the memory of these [ the smell of these ] that still lingers,  
long after the shape of his face has begun to fade.

[ the Prostitutes story ; Luke 15;11-32]

When I gave the Retreat Conferences in 2010, like this weekend, I offered to meet some of  
retreatants one to one for 20mins each. In one of slots on Good Friday a lady came to see me  
and asked one question "why is it wrong for a Catholic to have an abortion?" we spoke and  
she seemed pleased with all I shared with her and left..on Holy Saturday she asked to see me  
again..felt slightly irked she wanted second bite of cake  
..however I agreed and she came again..  
..this time she explained she had only recently become a Catholic and realised during the  
classes of instruction what the Church teaches on abortion, the taking of human life..from  
moment of conception the child is "a human being with potential" not

“a potential human being” a child of God from conception..she was evidently carrying huge weight of guilt, a heavy cross..and “looking at her steadily and loving her” a question came to my mind and heart inspired by Holy Spirit, and I said to her “have you ever thought of naming your child?”..few moments of silence then a spark of hope and possibility in her eyes..told her her baby would be in Heaven..how Church taught that if a baby died before baptism it went to limbo..however, in recent years the Church had reformed its understanding “semper reformanda” and it now teaches the baby's soul goes straight to Heaven..your baby is in Heaven, your very own saint your own child..

she wept..years of captivity in her invisible prison, years in a Holy Saturday mourning the loss regretful of circumstances, and now Holy Saturday 2010 released..a beautiful smile of redemption and of resurrection..

I suggested she shouldn't rush to choose a name, I would pray for them both from now on, and when eventually you decide on a name, would she email me so I could pray for her baby by name?..3wks later she emailed me..full of gratitude for all we had shared..and she had decided to call her baby “Alitheia” she had been in my talk on Pilate and truth, where truth met truth, and she wanted her child to be truthfully called

“Alitheia” her that cannot be forgotten..

and each Christmas I receive a card from her signed “from Rebecca and Alitheia”

..the smell the aroma the truthfulness of a divine relationship “I am someone you know very well..”..”imagine breathing a stranger in..”

Fr Bede Leach OSB  
Ampleforth Abbey