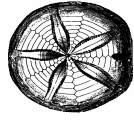


Haven't You The Wit . . . ?

Why do you keep pestering me,
Scratching at the window pane?
Leave me be!
Why do you ferret me out,
Scenting me in my burrow maze?
Stop bothering me!
Why do you scour the place for me,
Like a householder looking for a thief?
Haven't you anything better to do?
I'll hide myself from your preying eyes;
You'll never find me,
I'll disguise myself!
You'll never recognise me.
I'll deceive you!
You'll be at a loss
To know what to do.
Give me peace!
Haven't you the wit
To see I cannot cope with you –
With you who have earmarked me
For life?

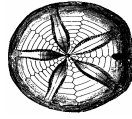


The Price

. . . the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices'. When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'. After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Mark 12.32-34

'Why have you come,
Proclaiming you're Messiah,
Disturbing our neat and ordered lives
Of sacrifice and psalmody,
The morning and the evening prayer,
The yearly journey to Jerusalem,
The billowing clouds of incense smoke,
The fatted calf, the paschal lamb,
The oil poured out, the basket full of corn?
What more do you want our Deity to have?
Our purses bare and empty?'
And he unrolled the parchment scroll
And cried aloud the words he read:
'I have come to set you free,
To lift the burden of the Law,
To open wide the prison gate,
To loose tongues that are dumb,
To sight the blinded eye,
To make the lame a-dancing go,
And make the lepers clean.
What more do you want your Deity to do?'
'We'd like to ask you, Sir', they said,
'What coin we pay
For this good news?'



INTRODUCTION


'Imagination is evidence of the Divine'


William Blake (1757-1827)


☉ It was in a bygone age that I was first introduced to the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, and that introduction was not particularly fortuitous. It was a time when those who handled the Exercises would, with the best of intentions, pump as much spiritual information as they could think of into their retreatants' heads. We had five talks a day, nearly every day for thirty days. It was not until thirty *years* later that I really began to understand the Spiritual Exercises, when I made them under the guidance of a director, one to one. This for me was a turning point, a revolution and a revelation of the Spirit at work in my life. I learnt to discern the movements of that Spirit. Many of the poems in this collection are closely linked to the dynamic of the Exercises and, especially, to the contemplations of the life of Jesus.


☉ One of the tools of the Spiritual Exercises is the imagination. 'Imagine', says Jesus at one point, 'a sower going out to sow. . .'. Imagine! Imagination is a true way of knowing; it can be thought of as '*the access to the real through the unreal*'.


☉ Sometimes, I know, my imagination runs away with me, and I begin to wonder whether the imagination is a tool which I use, or whether I have become the tool of my imagination. The poems write themselves. It is a strange experience. A line appears from nowhere, leading to another and yet another; the lines tumble out, I know not how. I do not know how the line 'Allowed a womb-wick light to glow' in the poem on the Incarnation emerged—I only mistily understand it, yet it speaks to me of what I can only describe as the undertow of the Spirit's guiding presence.


 The imagination can lift the past into the present; it can also project us into the future. We come to terms with what we have been; we grapple with what, under God's grace, we can become. We contemplate the Gospel Word as he lives, acts and teaches; we contemplate how this Word might change us and direct our steps towards a fuller life. Imagination is at the heart of conversion. We change, not because of doctrinal argument or moral persuasion, though both have their place, but because the imagination calls us into a new future and offers us an incentive to change. Imagination offers us images and pictures of how the pieces of our lives could fit together in a completely new way. This, I believe, is precisely what happened in Jesus' own life. Brought up in the traditions of his people, he was steeped in their stories. What obviously fascinated him was the Kingdom story, which had begun with Samuel and had continued right down to his day. In the hands of the prophets, the concept of the Kingdom changed: no longer was it a narrowly nationalistic territorial venture, but rather a dream of all peoples on the planet living together in peace, truth, justice and love, and sharing the resources of the earth. This dream Jesus made his own. He put together the pieces of his world in a completely new way. 'The Kingdom of God has come near', he said. The Kingdom he proclaimed was the fruit of his imagination.

 As servants of God's kingdom, we struggle to bring God's transforming love to the world. We have a need, therefore, to know something about what we are doing. The imagination supplies this need. It is our imagination we bring to bear on the world around us, and in so doing we shape and transform not only what lies outside us, but also our own selves. The active use of the imagination reveals a God at work, creating and liberating the world.

 Imagination enables us to picture reality in a new way. Imagination enables us to remake reality, to discern something different from what appears at first glance. Imagination is more than a day-dreamer's flight from reality. Imagination is more than the irresponsible fantasy that fabricates an image in order to evade reality. Imagination is having the courage to think and say something new. The tantalizing question: 'What would happen if . . . ?' has given birth to inventions, to revolutions, to new social movements. And only imagination can answer it.

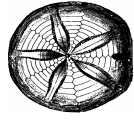
 Imagination fuels the virtue of hope. Hope is the dynamic of the unfulfilled self. Hope is more than mere optimism. Hope is not the expectation that something will turn out well, but rather the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. Hope is rooted in God's power to make use of humanity's folly. Hope is to believe that the future is benign.

 I was born in Wales, and whenever I manage to cross Offa's Dyke I feel at home. For my childhood holidays, we used to motor up from Cardiff to a big house called Mia Hall, outside Dyserth. This house had a chapel-of-ease in its grounds, and occasionally, a priest from Saint Beuno's used to come and say Mass on a Sunday. Saint Beuno's also figured in my mother's life. As a girl she was a boarder at the Convent in Rhyl, and was a close friend of the daughter of the Leach family; Mr Leach, at that time, was the bailiff of the Saint Beuno's farm. It was on that farm she spent many of her holidays, round about 1905. It was at Saint Beuno's that in 1941 I entered the Jesuit novitiate, and there I stayed until the summer of 1945. Today it is a Spirituality Centre where I frequently go, either to give the Exercises or to make my own retreat. Saint Beuno's is perched on the side of Maen-Effa, with magnificent views of the Clwyd Valley. Saint Beuno's has straddled my life. I have loved it and hated it at varying times in equal measure. It has had a great influence over me. This explains why one of the few longer poems in this collection is entitled, simply, 'The Valley Of The Clwyd', and why much of what I present here was written there.

 The poems which appear in this collection are the fruit of the imagination. They have been written over a period of some forty years, but only about half a dozen have ever been published before. Now in my greying years there is time; and so, encouraged by my friends, and with the support and opportunity given me by my brethren, I am offering my friends and brethren these poems. I also feel I have a duty to acknowledge my ability to write. That this is gift, I have no doubt. But it has taken me perhaps some sixty years to recognise it.

*Patrick Purnell SJ
De Nobili, Southall, 2003*

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