

Reflection from Fr. Colm on the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Audio posted to the Parish Website on Sunday 31st January 2021.

Hi everybody hope you're okay. Two steps from Hell doesn't sound like a very encouraging or positive name for music or an orchestra but that in fact is the name of one of the most inspiring pieces of music I've heard in a long time. It's called "Heart of courage" and it's used by Doctor Rachel Clarke who's a palliative doctor. She plays it over and over again as she drives into hospital facing the enormous challenges of covid wards and palliative care in other parts of her profession. She's a great lady and very inspiring to listen to and I've just had the good fortune to have listened to her reflect on her life, the influences on her life, and how she is uplifted.

Her books are very popular but listening to her indeed as speaking is much more inspiring, I've found. She did speak with a heavy heart on the plight of frontline NHS staff and how the demands being made on her to uplift them and to give them inspiration is a constant drain on her but she said it's so worthwhile. But she talked with great inspiration, she's never been more inspired by those who are in the last throws of life and hanging on there and seeing the wonderful positives in the here and now.

She's had to unfortunately receive a fair amount of hate mail by some anti-vaccine groups rage against her for stressing how bed shortages etc were pushing the NHS staff to the limits. However, these are the negatives, it was no rant but a proclamation on the heroism of the staff, the families, and the dying patients themselves. Music she said was pivotal in her coming to terms with coping. She singled out Jimi Hendrix "All along the watchtower" which I was fortunate enough myself to actually see the writer of that song Bob Dylan perform and it was fantastic. She also cited Elgar, Bach, then she talked about the uplifting that birdsong on the morning can give to her before she heads off into a long day's work.

She's one of many prophetic voices that we're hearing today in these troubled times, in a week when the vaccine has been rolled out brilliantly, we hear of the unfortunate inequalities in that rollout worldwide. Please God that will be addressed. This is an aspect of the Bob Dylan song "All along the watchtower" it challenges it's the inequalities of the rich and the poor the white-collar versus the blue-

collar. Someone said that the prophets proclaim the present and do not predict the future. Prophets proclaim the present moment and do not predict the future.

Archbishop Helder Camara the Brazilian Archbishop of Recife long since deceased sadly said at the second gathering of Latin American Bishops at Medellín what has changed? He asked them what has changed since our first meeting. The rich continue to get richer and the poor get poorer. That was then, but perhaps the same questions can be asked in the context of covid and how it's going to impact on us by way of the rich getting richer. We see the extraordinary wealth of the billionaires worldwide ballooning to extraordinary proportions.

We however where we find ourselves now maybe in lockdown or at home wherever that might be we're asked to try to cherish those moments and just to lift up our spirits in a positive way. Raymond Carver the American poet invites us to look at the positive when he wrote "*there isn't enough of anything as long as we live but at intervals, a sweetness appears and given a chance prevails.*" Perhaps these are our moments too to let that sweetness appear with a sense of authority and hope to counteract the awful statistics which again please God are on the slide. This is what Rachel Clarke, the one thing that she found most difficult to face on an early morning drive was the constant churning out of tragic statistics and so she simply said I had to turn it off and I had to focus on what's positive. Music. Birdsong. These were just some of the things that had a positive influence on her.

In the Gospel today St Mark is telling us in describing Jesus in the synagogue again, but unlike in St Luke, there's a real action supplementing his proclamation of the Good News. A demoniac is healed, given new life, and really what St Mark is saying action has to be present in our lives as Christians all the time inseparable from teaching, inseparable from reflection; we have to act on it. And thus, we can perhaps bring that sense of courage and hope to the many whom we meet. Do take care please God now we're coming out of this.