

THE POETRY OF FAITH

*“Teach us to care and not to care.
Teach us to sit still”.*

T. S. Eliot

Jesus said when you pray go into your room and lock the door. Blaise Pascal saw that most of our problems stem from our inability to sit quietly in our own chamber. The wisdom of the desert Fathers and Mothers was that your cell will teach you everything. Learning to live with ourselves, watching our breathing, which connects us with the earth, with all of humanity and with God - who breathes Spirit in us: quieting our minds, accepting what is: and awakening our hearts, discovering that the Kingdom of God is within: we can begin to open ourselves to God’s healing grace, and realize that God’s first gift to us is to be able to say “I am”.

*“When it’s over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.*

*When it’s over I don’t want to wonder
if I made of my life something particular, and real.
I don’t want to find myself sighing and frightened,
and full of argument.*

I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world”.

Mary Oliver

G. K. Chesterton, following a period of depression, experienced a “burst of astonishment at our own existence” The task of the artistic and spiritual life, he saw, “is to dig for this sunrise of wonder”: A generation later Philip Toynbee wrote in his journal: **“The basic command of religion is not ‘do this’ or ‘do not so that!’ but ‘look!’ . To which I would add: “And live!”**

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Poetry, like prayer, is “the marriage of said and unsaid”, where we experience the world through disclosure and concealment. It is never perfectly understood, because words notoriously lack precision. But neither is poetry or prayer “a fancy way of hiding our meaning”. Both ask of us to face our truth - even, as the English poet David Gascoyne knew - that “Perhaps/only the poem I can never write is true”. Richard Rohr says that “poverty of spirit” means that we can’t fix, can’t control, or understand. Yet this “unknowing” – when, after the long struggle to express our truth we fall into silence – we discover that this is precisely the right place where we can come to know God.

We “must learn to be...incomplete...a space within which God...can act”.

Simon Tugwell