

The Recovery of Delight (LENT1A 2020)

I think it would be honest of me to say that my personal faith in Jesus really came to life when I learnt to be genuinely and consciously grateful for the gift of life. For me this insight came when I was attending prayer meetings in which praise and gratitude were at the heart. Here I discovered that I can consciously, deliberately and enthusiastically thank God for all kinds of things; the graces, gifts and blessings that come: in personal relationships, aesthetic experiences, contemplating life's mysteries, pondering the words of the Bible, times when my senses delight in the pure and raw beauty of the natural world.

Indeed, I have come to appreciate that there is nothing we cannot praise God for. I can even praise God when I'm down, distracted, discouraged or afraid. At such times the problem or situation might not automatically resolve itself, but my understanding of it can be transformed and my hope shored up.

Now, before you begin to think this man's deluded or worse still, a mystic; let me assure you that life is not a bed of roses and my struggles, doubts and failings bear comparison with most lives. Although I haven't had to endure the half of what some people bear with great dignity. But I am saying that choosing gratitude as an attitude and consciously expressing thanks and praise permanently changed how I relate to God.

But again, because I am flawed, because I allow other things to distract my attention, claim my heart and bloat my pride, I constantly forget this lesson and to coin a phrase, lose my capacity for delight.

Actually, I didn't coin this phrase I lifted it from a book called *Delighting in God*, by Melvyn Matthews, who writes:

“We have lost our capacity for delight. Our capacity to see what is before us as the gift of God is severely damaged. What we see is either our own or somebody else's “property”. The recovery of delight, the ability to see what is as

gift, can only occur when we lose (let go of) our demand for possession and control and come to ourselves. The recovery of delight will spring from a recovery of who we really are.”¹

These words are a kind of diagnosis of the problem of faith especially as we experience it as Christians in the West. This is not the place to go into this in full, of course, but Matthews suggests that we have fallen into a damaging habit of viewing everything as “someone’s property”, either our own or someone else’s; including immaterial things such as health, success, talent or ability. When things or qualities are seen as “possessions”, we either have them or we don’t and if we don’t; we want, envy or grasp them.

This is what the devil sought to capitalise on each time he addressed Jesus. After forty days in the desert the devil tried offering Jesus material goods, political power and popularity. You can have these things, suggested the devil, if you will compromise your relationship with God and your integrity.

¹ Melvyn Matthews *Delighting in God*, Collins Fount, (London, 1987), 83.

Jesus resolutely refused to compromise with the devil, whereas Adam and Eve coveted what was not theirs and treated something good, namely the knowledge of the truth, of the difference between good and evil, as something they could or should possess by right rather than appreciate as gift. This foreshadows the compromises we can all make with personal integrity and the cost is that our vision of Eden becomes blurred.

Lent, then, represents another opportunity to restore integrity and perspective to all of our relationships: our relationship with God in prayer, our perspective on the real value of material things and appetites by fasting and our capacity for generosity in almsgiving.

By doing our traditional Lenten practices with a renewed sense of gratitude for all we receive of life's graces and blessings we can, to rephrase some of the words we've just heard: recover delight by recovering who we really are in God's eyes.