

Presentation of the Lord 2020

Towards the end of her life Dorothy Day wrote in her diary:

“No matter how old I get... no matter how feeble, short of breath, incapable of walking more than a few blocks, what with heart murmurs, heart failures, emphysema perhaps, arthritis in feet and knees, with all these symptoms of age and decrepitude, my heart can still leap for joy as I read and suddenly assent to some great truth enunciated by some great mind and heart.”

Like Simeon and Anna, Dorothy Day had the gift of recognising God’s blessings in whatever form they presented themselves to her. She found delight in the chance encounters with truth that came her way when she was reading.

And, like someone who appreciates great works of art without the words to say precisely why, she encountered beauty in the destitute people she assisted in her work. She remained passionate in her advocacy of social justice when her contemporaries were happy to draw their pension. But it is her capacity to rejoice that connects her with Simeon and Anna who two millennia earlier rejoiced at the sight of Jesus when he was carried to the temple by Mary and Joseph.

Their collective example, like that of so many others who have lived long and good lives, reassures us that we don't need perfect health, youthful bodies, educated minds or generous pension plans to find joy in our later years; indeed letting go of these things brings its own wisdom, reacquainting us with the simpler pleasures of life. A return to the gift of wonder when we look upon a new born child, more time to ponder on the

meaning of life and see it through the prism of God's word in the Holy Scriptures, and yes, more time to rediscover the comforting routine of prayer and liturgy. All these things have the capacity to bring us a different quality of joy that feeds on our greater experience of life and values simple gifts. The poet Elizabeth Jennings finds a similar delight to Dorothy Day in the celebration of the Eucharist:

Every moment of enchantment we've
Ever known joy here is present and
Our best love is shown when we receive
God so simply. We can understand
Less than we believe.

For here all intuitions gather to
Show our hopes are valid and made clear.
Passion falters. Love alone will do
As God shows his creation need not fear
Great wishes won't come true.¹

¹ Elizabeth Jennings: *Nothing matters but this Holy Meal*

And here I pinch some words from a homily by a Dominican priest for today's feast. David Rocks has put it in a way I couldn't improve upon when he says:

As our winter days start to look like spring, we have the courage to challenge the darkness with our candlelight this Candlemas, as Eleanor Roosevelt said "it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness'. It might not overcome it, but it does diminish it.

We are people of hope, called to be visionaries of what is beyond the bleakness and darkness of sin and division, of illness and strife. In our own hour of struggle, when the sword is piercing our own hearts too, have we the courage to pray for purity of heart and to contemplate God's love?

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