

The Genius of the Poor

(OTC24 2019 read only version)

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For many of us the arts in their different forms provide: encouragement, inspiration, consolation, joy and challenge. Life would be very dull without the creativity of artists.

Sometimes their life stories reveal that their art was influenced and shaped by personal struggles, sufferings and loss.

One particularly well known example is Van Gogh who lived a very troubled life, as did the poet John Clare. In our own day Tracy Emin has achieved notoriety and sympathy in equal measure for artworks drawing on aspects of her life that many would disclose only to trustworthy confidants.

Whether or not we like their particular style, or share their views, the fact that artists provide the public with material touching on the underside of life can be a helpful stimulus for conversations,

debates and arguments about our own important or troubling experiences.

However, a still greater resource, one that is even closer to hand, often goes unnoticed, but not by the French thinker Christian Bobin, who wrote:

*The frequently troubled lives of the creative impress me less than those of **the poor**. It takes **as much genius** – in the way of **courage, dreams, patience and impatience, innocence and ruse** – **to find rent money and clothe the children as to put together a masterpiece.***

Wow – how true is that? Just think of those who even now have to eke out meals with the help of Food Banks, or those who courageously conjure up the magic of Christmas from very little.

The efforts of those who struggle to provide even the most basic needs of daily life for themselves and their dependants, is deserving of awe, respect, recognition and celebration. Which is not to say that we shouldn't do all we can as a society

to alleviate poverty in every single one of its guises; economic, social, educational, emotional and spiritual. But when we do this with a sense of superiority, or pity rather than as an act of justice, mutual respect and solidarity we miss the point and deprive ourselves of sharing the joy on offer.

The woman in the parable of the Lost Coin represents all the unsung domestic heroes, including those working long and arduous hours for meagre rewards, the poorly paid or unpaid carers. Those who more often than not pay a high price with their own health in trying to keep things afloat, for their loved ones and dependents.

Many suffer from anxiety, depression, and all kinds of ill-health brought on by denying themselves food, clothes or heating so that others don't have to go without. But every once in a while, the beauty of their souls is revealed in the small triumphs when their troubles are momentarily lifted; by an act kindness, a turn of

fortune or their own ingenuity, and it is time to rejoice as did the woman who found her lost coin.

These are the people who populate Jesus' parables because they are the people with whom he preferred to associate, at whose tables he was pleased to share and whose company he most enjoyed. It may have caused scandal to the haughty and self-righteous; as we heard in the Gospel. But Jesus was resolute in pointing out how God's love can shine into the darkest midst of human woes.

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