

## THE WORLD WILL BE SAVED BY BEAUTY

This was the title of Kate Hennessey's lovely book about her grandmother Dorothy Day, who transformed many people's lives through her acts of kindness to the poor and homeless. She created a community where people could share in one another's lives. She fought for labour rights, women's rights, and an end to World War 1. While attending a march against hunger in Washington DC; she prayed that God would open up a way for her to practice her radical politics as a devout Catholic. Her prayer was answered in the person of Peter Maurin, a French peasant intellectual and within a few months they founded the Catholic Worker Movement (CWM). Her legacy lives on today and the CWM today has over 200 communities. The Workers commit to voluntary poverty, prayer, nonviolence, and hospitality to those in need. They protest and take action against systems of injustice, war, racism, and all forms of violence. Dorothy's spirituality meant she could not worship God without honouring those human beings who were made in his image. She said of her fellow human beings, "We should feed them when they were hungry; shelter them when they were homeless. We should not torture them; we should not kill them." Dorothy was arrested and put in prison many times for her activities, even at the age of 75 years. She would insist that what kept her going was her prayer: each day she would begin with meditation on scripture, attend daily Mass, recite the breviary (psalms, scripture readings and bidding prayers). Her spirituality was rooted in a constant effort to be more charitable towards those closest at hand. Dorothy's life shines a beautiful light on the troubles and sorrows of the world in her day; perhaps she can also shed light on our present situation as we learn to adjust to live in a post Covid-19 world.

It seems that the UK government is hell-bent on getting us back to normal – everything opening, pubs, businesses, shops, gyms and museums. But the majority of people are more concerned about returning to work before it is safe, sending their kids to school before it is safe. But we cannot go back to what it was before the coronavirus pandemic. I was heartened to hear the New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern talking about a four day working week as a solution to the fact that the country is very dependent on tourism. It can no longer fling its doors open to tourists in the way it has in the past, so Ardern has the idea that New Zealanders should work less, be paid the same and have more leisure time to be able to enjoy their own country safely. It seems that any attempt to try and go back to normal, the virus surges back and says, "Slow down". Arden also suggests that as far as schools are concerned - why not have twice as many teachers with half-the-size classrooms and figure out more ways to do outdoor education?

Naomi Klein, a social and climate activist, understands that issues such as the Black Lives Matter protests have been sharpened through Covid-19. 70% of the fatalities from the virus in Chicago were African Americans. Whether it's because they are the ones performing those at-risk jobs, without protection, or because of the legacies of environmental pollution in their communities, stress, trauma, unsafe workplaces and discriminatory healthcare, black communities are bearing a disproportionate burden of the fatalities from the virus, defying that we were all in this together. Klein tells us that many of these protests are truly multiracial, and that the coronavirus pandemic has created a space that has enabled compassion to grow and flourish. When you slow down, you begin to feel things more, because in the rat race there is little time for empathy. It seems from the very beginning, the virus has forced us to think about our interdependence, our relationships and our communities. People are thinking differently now – especially about everything they touch. They ask themselves, "What has somebody else touched? What about the food I am eating, the package that was just delivered, the food on the shelves? These are connections that capitalism teaches us NOT to think about. The coronavirus pandemic has forced us to think in more interconnected ways and has "softened" us up to think about these racist atrocities like the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. We have, in fact, begun to think more deeply about many things that matter, not just black lives.

As we open our churches for Mass this weekend for the first time since March 15th, I know many parishioners will stay away for all kinds of understandable reasons. But it is worth recalling the wonderful story of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French priest and geologist. Finding himself, on one occasion, out in China's Ordos Desert where he was unable to celebrate Mass, Teilhard sat down and composed a work entitled "The Mass on the World." It contains these beautiful truths:

"Since once again, Lord, I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar....I, your servant, will make the whole earth my altar and on it I will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.....I call before me the whole vast anonymous army of living humanity, those who surround me and support me though I do not know them.....I know that we cannot dictate or change your actions; from you alone come all initiative – and this applies in the first place to my prayer.....Do you now, therefore, speaking through my lips, pronounce over this earthly labour your two-fold efficacious word..... Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day, say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again the commanding words, which express the great mystery of faith: This is my Blood."

This has been referred to as a True Cosmic Liturgy, where the whole cosmos becomes a living host. I pray that all of us (all those baptised), who share in Christ's Priesthood can offer this pray during this pandemic. That's why we have been discussing with the Reflection Group recently about our First Holy Communion children, who have practically finished their preparation, but have not yet received holy communion. We are trying to figure out the best way we can make this happen, and not just wait until "all this (Covid-19) is over", which may not happen for a long time. Whether we achieve this by each family having a "House Mass" or a couple of families coming together to celebrate a Mass in their garden, will be up to the families themselves to decide. But we can and must achieve a true cosmic liturgy for our children by the means that are available to us. Let's not leave it for some unknown future date!

In the year of the 250th anniversary of his birth, I am reminded of a story from the life of Ludwig van Beethoven, whose close friend, Dorothea von Ertmann, first lost one of her small children, then another, and then another, until all her small children were dead. Beethoven at first found no words to say to her. But finally, at the piano, he turned to Dorothea and said, "Let us converse in music". And he played for over an hour. Later, Dorothea remarked to a friend, "He said everything to me, and also finally brought me consolation." No small part of that consolation, I would say, is that Dorothea's anguish, her experience of loss, was named - it was given a voice. This is what music, art, poetry, scripture, the liturgy can achieve. That's why the parables of Jesus continue to speak to us today. So, let us not lose our children to the uncertain consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, but give them what the gift that is worthy of all that they deserve. It is our gift too as a parish community.

Let me finish with the words of St Augustine of Hippo:

"Don't hold yourselves cheap, seeing that the Creator of all things, who values you so high, so dear, that he pours out for you every day the most precious blood of his only begotten Son."

PS I heard a tragic story about a sesame seed who lost every penny he owed in a casino over the summer. He kept insisting that he was on a roll.

Did you hear about what happened when the French cheese factory exploded? The whole area was covered in de-Brie.

A reporter meets a man carrying a 4-metre-long metal stick and asks "Are you a pole-vaulter?" "No," replies the man, "I'm German. But how did you know my name was Walter?"