

Parish Lenten Retreat

“Deus ibi est” “God is There”

Where Charity and Love are, God is There.

Ubi Caritas et Amore, Deus ibi est.

Gerard Manley Hopkins – Week 2

Jesuit priest and poet, born at Stratford, near London, July 1844, died in Dublin, June 1889.

Education and Formation

His early education was received at Highgate School, where he gave evidence of fine intellectual endowments, scholarly tastes and poetical gifts above the ordinary. The numerous conversions from Anglicanism to the Catholic Church in the middle of the nineteenth century together with the spirit of the Oxford Movement were not without their effect on the young student, and in October, 1866, he was received into the Church. In the following year he entered Balliol College, Oxford. Very soon his religious vocation manifested itself and he left the university, going to Birmingham Oratory. In 1868 he entered the Society of Jesus. After ordination he was sent to Liverpool where his work lay among the poor of the slums of that city. His next post was that of preacher in London, after which he was stationed at St Aloysius’ Church, Oxford. In 1884 he was elected fellow of the Royal University of Ireland and appointed classical examiner at Dublin. While still at school he had written verses of distinctive merit.

Poetry

The poetry which he subsequently wrote at various periods until the year of his death is of a very high quality. The poetry flows with exuberance of language, lyric qualities and daring metaphors. Saddened by the loss of the ship the *Deutschland* in December 1875, which had seven Franciscan nuns exiled for their faith among its passengers, Hopkins wrote his most ambitious poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1876). It was rejected by the Jesuit journal *The Month* as it was considered too difficult for its readers. Some of his best known poems include: *The Windhover*, *Pied Beauty*, *Glory Be To God For Dappled Things*, *I Find Myself* and *In Honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez*.

Reflecting

The inner life of Hopkins is reflected in his poetry. Hopkins was aware of his inner thoughts and feelings and expressed his personal struggles in poetry. Working with word, rhyme and verse helped Hopkins to pray and create beauty from his inner world. Hopkins had a keen appreciation for God found in nature. Hopkins possessed tremendous insight into his own complex human nature and found the divine within. The poet knew the rhythms of consolation and desolation in a life of reflection and spiritual growth. Several of his assignments in ministry were extremely challenging to him on many levels. Hopkins struggled during his life with mood swings and depression. He used his poetry and prayer as a way of understanding his life and faith. His poetry will always be among the greatest poems of faith and doubt in the English language. None of his poetry was ever published in his lifetime. However, even on his death bed while suffering from typhoid fever, he was able to say in his last words, “I am so happy, I am so happy. I loved my life.”

Reflecting On Our Life

Hopkins learned to reflect on his experiences in life through prayer and poetry. The poet’s life expresses the words of St. Paul who writes, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13) Reflecting on his life, Hopkins was able to discern God’s presence, knowing that “*Jesus Listens*” and that “*God is There.*”

(over)

A Poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1888

History

Located in the Mediterranean Sea, Majorca, is the largest island of Spain. The Jesuit College of Palma was housed on the island. In the Society of Jesus each member fulfills a certain purpose for the community's mission. One laybrother, named Alphonsus Rodriguez, had the job of opening and closing the door to the main hall of the college for his brother Jesuits and guests. Day by day, for forty years, Alphonsus graciously and with an ardent cheerfulness welcomed and bid farewell to all who entered and departed. The gift of prayerful hospitality, given in the name of Christ, was recognized by the official Church in bestowing Sainthood.

Hopkins wrote the following poem as a reflection on the spiritual challenges encountered even in a simple life. God sees and affirms our smallest and most ordinary actions done with love. The world may not recognize greatness within a heart and soul, but God knows and delights in selfless inner conquests. *Where Charity and Love are, God is there.*

In honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez

Laybrother of the Society of Jesus upon the
first falling of his feast after his canonization
for the College of Palma in the Island of Majorca,
where the saint lived for 40 years as hall porter.

Glory is a flame off exploit, so we say,^o
And those fell strokes that once scarred flesh, scored shield,
Should tongue that time now, trumpet now that field,
Record, and on the fighter forge the day.
On Christ they do, they on the martyr may;
But where war is within, what sword we wield
Not seen, the heroic breast not outward-steeled,
Earth hears no hurtle then from fiercest fray.
Yet, he that hews out mountain, continent,
Earth, all, at last: who, with fine increment
Trickling, veins violets and tall trees makes more
Could crowd career with conquest while there went
Those years and years by of world without event
That in Majorca Alfonso watched the door.

Interpretation

Lines 1, 2, 3, 4 give vivid images of the glory and honor bestowed upon warriors who win battles and bear the scars of their effort in body and on armor. Tongues acclaim and trumpets celebrate their valor. Line 5 evokes the image of Christ and martyrs who bear the marks of their suffering on their bodies. Line 6 directs our attention to a different type of war, the war within ourselves which is not physical. Our inner battles are not known to the world, the scars they cause unseen. Lines 9, 10, 11 offer God's perspective on inner struggle. God who creates mountains and even the delicate veins on a flower knows the restlessness of the human heart. Lines 12, 13, 14 express how God acclaims our victories of the spirit. The simple career of a door porter was crowded with noble exploits unseen by the world but treasured as glorious by God.

Note: Hopkins poems are not easily understood, but grow in richness and meaning the more we reflect upon them—much like our own lives.

Reflection Questions

Each day I perform ordinary tasks. How can I grow in my awareness of God's presence in the little things I do for necessity? For duty? For love?

What glory and honor is God acknowledging in my life?