

Home Retreat; Saturday 8 October 2022

- “..my minds wandering on me again. Where was I?”

..just a month today since Her Majesty the Queen died peacefully at Balmoral on 8 September 2022 feast of Our Lady’s birthday..Our Lady Queen of Heaven. The Irish call it “months mind” a day of special remembrance with Mass offered for the repose of the loved one, as it marks a liminal moment as family begin a new chapter in their journey of loss grief & thanksgiving..

The Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage, a fellow Yorkshireman of mine, he from the Colne Valley, me from the Aire Valley, both in West Riding & proud of it, wrote poem “Floral Tribute” to commemorate the Queen’s death..

“..a promise made & kept for life-that was your gift. The country loaded its whole self into your slender hands, hands that can rest now, relieved of a century’s weight..”
.. copy is on-line for you on our website..

- Over a year ago I was introduced to something termed “slow television”; saw one episode which filmed a simple journey of a single deck bus from Ripon to Masham up Swaledale..a camera mounted in back of bus..constant gentle background hum of engine of bus..no commentary no titles on screen to identify current village..an occasional murmur as a boarding or alighting passenger shared word with driver..the camera moved to take in fields or villages, oncoming traffic going south, a rattle as bus bumped in & out of potholes..a timeless opportunity on a bus wedded to timetable ..it reminded me of lectio divina where we are offered the scriptural passage & we are left allowed empowered inspired to get on with it, into it, to be taken onboard it & eventually discover someone we know very well..person we see in the drivers rear view mirror..

- ..it all came back to me as I watched journey of the Queen’s coffin..slow television; Balmoral to Edinburgh & at the Lying in State initially in St Giles Cathedral & then later in Westminster Hall..

no sound no commentary no sub-titles..an invitation into encounter with body person & moment..permission to pray ponder translate..make sacred..a long & precious sacrament of the present moment..more I looked silently without distraction of voice or sub title more intimate divine it became..kept drawing me back to screen five or six times during five hour journey..“Lord it is wonderful for us [for me] to be here” a personal encounter..a transfiguration moment..to ”come out” from behind my mask & to come back to real life different “& he shone at his work!”..again..

..in Westminster an Emmaus walk 16hr queue “as he/she talked to us on the road”

& a welcome to at least one “acquaintance” to go home for meal & bed for night..”the absence of risk is a sure sign of mediocrity”

faces in St Giles & then in Westminster Hall each told a story

[akin to Good Friday Veneration of Cross OL&SB]

Interweaving grief loss over HMQ with their own grief loss moments some of which due to Covid or for family reasons hadn’t been faced & prayed into life & on eventually into new life..an emerging a resurrection moment “she has Risen” & they/we/me too..

Sign of the Cross..proud & tearful to see it so often..a visible profession of

faith..& now from now on..

..perhaps 12noon & 6pm daily Angelus..slow spirituality..to pause & pray..

- ..& then to my surprise this last Monday when we were blessed to have the Relics of St Bernadette in our Abbey Church for a precious 3hrs..
I went in at 345pm expecting to sit & pray the Rosary & discovered another example of slow spirituality as a constant impressively long crocodile of local parishioners, students from College, children from Class 4 of St Benedict's PS in Village, waited in reverent silence & thoughtfulness to pray & venerate the Reliquary..going forward two by two to kneel or stand, to rest on it or kiss it & make the Sign of the Cross..
..as with Queen & now St Bernadette, each face told a different story a gospel story of their own as each & every one of them made that Reliquary more holy before its journey on to St Anne's Cathedral in Leeds..
& in this month of October, month of Holy Rosary, all fifteen decades of Rosary were alive & at prayer in those pilgrims who came to weave their story to the divine story..

- like to read to you some slow spirituality..story by Northern Irish writer Michael McLaverty called "The Half Crown" it came to mind as I saw last week the Royal Mints first coinage with Head of King Charles on it, as we ask & pray for Our Lord's blessing on his life ministry family & faith..
..the words of his mother a mission statement for her for King Charles & for us in faith "duty first..self second"

"The Half Crown"

- ..read it yourselves again please in slow time & be surprised at what & who appears for you..
..& next time I share a Home Retreat with you, I will share with you part 2 of the story..slow time slow spirituality between now & then for you to look into the rear view mirror & meet again someone you are surprisingly meeting again, fully again, perhaps for first time in a lifetime, in these holy moments..

"Christ is the morning star, who when the night of this world is ended, brings to his saints the promise of the light of life, & opens everlasting day" [St Bede]

..for the Queen & for your own deceased loved ones in your royal family.."eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, & let perpetual light shine on them..may they rest in peace. Amen."

• My mind's wandering on me again. Where was I? Yes, Jimmy washed himself in the scullery & I boiled a fresh egg for his tea. He didn't want any hot water for shaving for he said he wasn't going out. Merciful God, he wasn't going out! He said he was in no hurry for his tea & he'd wait until Mary & Anne had got theirs. He lay on the sofa.. his shirt was open at the neck & his face was red & fresh after the good washing he gave himself. I handed him his slippers that I had warming at the side of the hob & I lifted his working shoes to give them a brush or two for the morning. And when the girls had finished their tea I cleared away the soiled dishes & asked Jimmy to sit over to the table. The girls were brushing their hair at that looking-glass on the wall. "where are you set for the night? You're in a hell of a hurry" Jimmy said. "the pictures" .."who's taking you?" .."we're taking ourselves" "you must have plenty of spondulics when you can go every night in the week to the damned pictures." "it's our own money. We never see much of yours. You'd never ask us to the pictures ..not if you got in for nothing."

"I'd like my job taking you two anywhere."

I disremember rightly what happened after that but I think Mary sat on the sofa & Anne went upstairs for her good coat from the back of the door & I went out to the yard for a shovel of coal. That coal was always damp & I mind the way it hissed on the fire & Jimmy saying he must put sides on that shelter in the yard. It was then that I seen Mary standing on the fender & looking on the mantle piece & asking if I saw her half-crown. "it's there beside the clock where you left it," I said.

"it's not" she stood on a chair & lifted up the clock & looked under it & behind it.

"did you take it Mother?" .."I didn't lay a finger on it."

Anne came into the kitchen with her good coat on, ready for the road. I don't know what happened next for my mind is all in a tangle. But I remember both of them talking at once & asking Jimmy to fork up the half-crown & not be coddling any more & keeping them late. Jimmy laughed & I thought by the way he laughed he was fooling them & hiding the money on them. They eyed the time by the clock & they shouted at him to stop the bloody nonsense & give them the half-crown & not keep them late.

"I didn't touch it, I tell you," he said.

"you're a liar!" they shouted back at him, & I told them to hush & not let the next-door neighbour hear them fighting.

"you're a liar!" Mary shouted again, for she had a she-devil's temper when you roused her. She tapped her foot on the floor & glared at him.

"you put your collar-stud on the mantelpiece when you were going to wash," she said, "the stud's there for all to see but the half-crown's not!"

Jimmy put down his cup & smiled at her.

"give it to them, son, if you have it, & don't keep them late," I said.

"didn't I tell you I never seen it!"

"you're a thief!" Mary screeched "that's what you are..a bloody thief!"

Jimmy jumped up from the table then & struck for her, for I remember Mary crying & expressions from her mouth that'd have shamed any decent-minded girl. Oh, them factories & warerooms is no place, let me tell you, to rear your children in; they hear every filth & it sticks in their minds like grease in an old pot. I done my best to quieten them & I told Jimmy he done wrong to hit her.

"I'll do it again if she calls me a thief!"

"you're a coward," Anne said. "only a coward would strike a girl."

Jimmy sat down again & I knew by the way his cup rattled on the saucer that he was sorry for what he'd done. I looked under the square of linoleum near the fender for the half-crown, & I looked under the sofa, & I took the tongs & searched in the ashes in the grate but I couldn't find it.

"it's no use looking for it," Anne said. "that playboy has it well hid. Make him give it up to us."

"Jimmy, son," I said, "give them the half-crown. It didn't fly off the mantelpiece by itself."

He stared at me & I'll remember that look to my dying day.

"so you don't believe me either. As sure as there's a God above me I didn't take it."

"you needn't bring God into it." I said, for I was annoyed at hearing him swear like that.

"he'd damn his soul over the head of it," Mary shouted.

I don't know what made me do it, but I remember asking Jimmy to turn out his pockets. Ah God forgive me for asking him to do the like of that! Sure I should have known he hadn't it after he swore he hadn't.

He got up from that side of the table near the looking-glass & he pushed his chair slowly..I'll never forget that! He went upstairs to his room & after five or six minutes of rummaging & rumbling he came down the stairs & banged the front door on his way out.

"under God where is away to?" I said.

"he's away to spend it," Mary jeered.

I went upstairs to his room & saw nothing behind the back of the door only a bare coat hangar, & on my way downstairs I noticed his heavy overcoat was gone from the rack in the hall.

"he's left us," I said.

"he'd be good riddance if he did," Mary said.

"he'll come back," I said, "Jimmy's not the kind of boy that'd run away from home."

Little did I know then, & it fifteen years ago, that he wouldn't come back. Yes, indeed fifteen long & lonesome years.

She rocked herself gently on the chair & began to cry. Then she dried her eyes in her apron & looked slowly round the cheerless kitchen. There was no light in it except the dull glow of the fire, & in the window space a blue sky was sprinkled with stars.

She shuddered & as she leaned forward to lever up the coal in the grate there was a loud knock at the door that startled her. She rested the poker on the hob & waited.

The knock came again. She hoisted herself from the chair, & as she walked down the hallway she heard the impatient shuffle of feet outside. She opened the door slowly & a few boys shouted breathlessly at her; "hurry up, Missus, we're going to light the bonfire now."

She hesitated for a moment in the hallway, & then pulling a shawl over her shoulders she made her way down to the middle of the street. The street lamps were in darkness & there was nothing but the tapping of feet, the mumble of unseen crowds, & a warm smell of paraffin. Boys, strangely dressed & their faces painted, were screaming like Indians & applying torches of paper to the heap of stuff they had collected. Then in a few minutes there came a hurl & burl of flame, a crackling of sticks, & a cheer from the crowd that drowned the noises of the fire. The flames lit up the faces & hands of the crowd & tilted their shadows on the redbrick houses. Flames like flowing water sped over the old sofa, a bicycle tyre was a ring of flame, leafy branches of trees hissed in the heat, & a rubber boot entangled among the twigs was furred with flame & dripped drops of fire from its writhing toe.

The old woman moved out from the heat with its sickening smell of paraffin, & stood in the cooler shadows cast by the outer ring of swaying onlookers. No one noticed her. They began to sing “Kevin Barry” & when the singing came to an end a loud cheer volleyed above the houses, squibs banged in the fire, & a rocket gushed into the sky trailing behind it an arc of bright blue stars. The noise frightened the old woman & she hurried away from it. Near her home she looked back & saw the smoke lighted up by the fire & heard an accordion playing an Irish reel. She didn’t stop to listen to it. She went into the house & halting in the hallway she clasped her hands & cried “Mother of God, are you listening to me? Wherever Jimmy is this night tell him that I believe him..tell him that from me!”

[the half-crown ; Michael McLaverty]