

The Perseverance of the Seed

The Gospel has a special affinity with anything small that “punches above its weight”; and we all enjoy this reality whenever it occurs in reality or in story. All the best stories do it: Cinderella conquering not only the Uglies but the Prince, Jack the Giant-killer, Goldilocks and the Big Bad Wolf – you could go on endlessly, and find that most such stories are paralleled in the Scripture (eg David and Goliath). In real life, we remember the English at Agincourt or against the Spanish Armada, or Alfred the Great beating the Danes, or St Patrick converting the heathen Irish. The truth behind such stories is that the appearance of weakness may conceal a surprising strength, and that within the flow of time things can very rapidly change. Hidden weaknesses are the reverse side of the coin: the fall of communism in the USSR is a good example. Even bristling with nuclear weaponry and possessing huge tracts of land and populations, the great empire of materialism was undermined internally by its own spiritual emptiness, its inattention to real human needs, its acceptance of material wealth as the ultimate truth. The sad thing about the world since that happening is that the West, far from being really victorious, is suffering from precisely the same sicknesses: spiritual starvation is just as prevalent here, and we are even more obsessed with consumerism - we've been better at it.

Deep Within Them I Plant My Law

Nevertheless, there is a secret process at work which can undercut the cancers we've developed: the reality of the seed of grace that is growing within us. We see evidence of its growth wherever people display their discontent with the world's recipe, whenever they insist on a deeper reason for acting than gain or profit. Again and again we see the hunger to belong, to be of help, to share, to forgive, to heal, to lay down life for others. These wholesome fruits are most certainly alive and well, and their persistence and patient endurance against all sorts of frosts and adversities cannot be doubted. People still long to love, and to be loved truly and sincerely. Where do such motives and instincts come from? Hardly from the “selfish gene” proposed by Professor Dawkins in his

jaundiced view of our nature. I think they're a sign that the human race is a divine project, and that God has not stopped holding our hand and tending our better ideas, helping us to grow beyond the various short cuts and fixes for which we're always falling.

Jesus As The Seed

We ourselves become a seed only when we offer ourselves totally to the plan of God. It's easy to have half a mind to do this, but that won't work – it's dishonest. God's plan is not a fall-back option or a “plan B” for when the worldly options close down. It's a *positive* choice that we opt for as “plan A”, and it has to be a total surrender. That's true of athletics, or science; or marrying, or parenthood, or prayer. Not a faint, distant reality that you can drift into: but a self-giving that can truly be called “laying down your life”. Going to heaven isn't a hobby, or something you do in your retirement years. As Jesus says today, you've got to want it so much that when you're not working towards it you *hate* what you're forced to do instead.

Now Is The Hour!

This is, indeed, an awesome demand on our butterfly nature. If we think about it for a while, it can seem frightening. But what is the alternative? Can we pray to be excused from the way of the Cross, without losing the hope that our life demands for its continuance? I, for one, don't think so. Jesus says that, in his going to the Cross, sentence is being passed on this world. That means that we have to make our choice. If we seek a different way forward, we will find ourselves tied to the fate of the world, instead of finding our share in Christ. Wise people have always hated half-measures and compromises. If you look into your own heart, you know that you've never enjoyed half-doing things or half-heartedly giving. What makes love such a turn-on - in ourselves or in others - is the way it unifies the whole person and recruits all powers to one aim and purpose. It's the greatest experience of selfhood we can have, precisely because it's selfless in its motivation. Jesus knew this on the very threshold of his Passion: “Whoever loves his life loses it, But whoever thinks little of his

life in this world will find it in eternity.”
Fr Philip