

An Acquired Taste

That's what my father said beer-drinking was about, when I lispingly demanded how anyone could drink the stuff. He was right, of course (I speak from personal experience).

Learning New Things

The experience of springtime may be a pretty enclosed one for a dweller in Monk's Road. I spot the blossom across the road, and when it gets to be June 18th the people outside start to take off their winter coats. But no-one with a telly can have any excuse for ignorance about the valiant blue-tits and swallows that are building their nests and families, and even the hoariest veteran human beings, like the parish priest, can be aware of the luscious greening of the creation outside, and the peeping presence of bright new eyes surveying with wonder the resurgent earth they are inheriting. In a previous incarnation I had badgers who came for supper each evening on my brightly-lit patio, and I will always remember the day they brought two cubs for their first outing to my restaurant.

Si La Jeunesse Savait

"If youth only *knew*, and if old age only *could*..." M. Estienne's famous cry of pain is understandable, but surely wrong. The green innocence of the young may be dangerous, but it's also our only hope; and the alleged wisdom of old age is too often a defeated and despairing verdict on earlier mistakes. Spring represents a yearly invitation for us to dream dreams and see visions once more, and to acknowledge what Jesus said, that only the youngest can enter the Reign of God. In the Scripture today we see that old chestnut, the story of the Fairy Godmother, who comes to dreaming Solomon and offers him, not three wishes, but only one. The story has certainly been laundered by royal spin-doctors, to present Solomon as the ultimately wise king (for a more realistic verdict, try 1Kings11). Solomon's obedient request for a share of divine wisdom to counter the tendencies of his youth would melt a heart of stone; one always suspects that a young person so ardent may be trying something on. In fact the

Almighty is so far won by the plea that he offers to fulfil it - with wealth and success as well - the things Solomon didn't ask for. I think what Solomon was asking for was an acquired taste for goodness, an instinct for what's true and genuine. That is what makes people good, what makes us say, *this is a really good person*. So often we meet people who have exalted something questionable into the position of goodness, and have made it their standard for everything else. I've met powerful people whose horizons were so dictated by their longing for power that they had little or no time for anything they couldn't recruit to their campaign. Even as they speak to you, such people are looking over your shoulder to see if someone more important is in the offing. They sit through the concert or the funeral someone's obliged them to attend, but their minds are in their office, planning the next telephone-call.

Christian Prayer

In prayer, as in a dream, we lay aside the instruments of trade or power, fold our hands, and turn to the fountain of truth and love which God has opened in our heart. Here we must be humble, and seek to be selfless, laying aside the narcissism and self-obsession from which we can suffer as children of this world. Now we know ourselves as creatures, not creators: *we the clay, you the potter*. In the presence of the true Creator, the only originator of life, we give ourselves to be re-made in his image, to be taught what Augustine calls *beauty, ancient and always new*. Coming to God is the re-entry into an eternal spring, constantly regenerating the cosmos, re-opening the gate to life in all that he has made. The beauty of it is that God shares his truth with us, even if it comes to us more in our dreams than in our full experience. It is the grain of humility, that salt of the earth, unnamed and uncontrived, which gives the savour of truth to our dreams. There is a treasure buried, there is a pearl that is peerless, there is a great haul of fish to be gone through, and we need to be given the

eye to see, and the heart to judge.
Philip

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