

We've put on green vestments again, and now we enter once more into that part of the year called "ordinary time". Can you imagine time becoming ordinary again for people who have seen a man risen from the dead? Neither can I. But so it is.

Nevertheless, we know that the fact of the Resurrection lays a charge at the roots of time. We have glimpsed the light pouring through the half-opened door, we can't pretend we know nothing of what is to come. We've also known moments, in the Easter experience, which demanded a complete revision of our understanding. We know such moments also in our life-experience.

Priests are much involved with people who stand at crossroads. They fetch us when new life comes into the world, and when the living depart from it into death. We are there when illness strikes, and people come to us when they have made massive realisations which demand a change of direction. People come to us whenever they feel the hand of God has been laid on them personally, to compare notes and share thoughts. People choosing great choices ask for help. People in fear of grave mistakes ask for advice. People getting ready to marry seek for help as they form their consent.

A few days ago we celebrated the Requiem Mass for Dr Anthony Watson. For once, the PP of St Hugh's had the opportunity to rest his vocal chords and listen. It struck me that, for this very active and influential man, there was a kind of giant turning-point when his whole life made a dramatic swerve and changed direction. One moment he was a deeply-committed healer, knowing vast numbers of people, respected for his medical wisdom and his generous care. In particular he was caring for his own beloved wife, who was suddenly made into an invalid. He was a powerful school governor for forty years. He was a magistrate, intervening in the cause of justice for many lives. The moment which changed all of that was the moment of his wife's death. Anthony was stricken in all departments of his life. All that activity now seemed to be empty, and worth finishing. He began to retreat into himself, and lost interest in the exercise of power. People tried in vain to encourage him into fresh projects and new efforts. He smiled and refused. It wasn't because he had lost his sense of direction. It was because something central in him had died.

We have endless projects for the spending of our life. But we can't pretend that these projects can ever be the whole meaning of us. Instead, we know that the purpose of our lives is hidden with God; and the things which really give us our meaning may well be the last thing we would have chosen, the very thing which looks like a disaster to us.

A farmer who wants his crops to grow protects them over months from the frosts, the storms, the wind and the rain, feeds them and nurtures them tenderly. But there comes a moment when the farmer knows the time has arrived; and at that moment he turns on the perfection he has so long and so laboriously prepared, and we see the beloved plants smashed to smithereens by the reaper, the binder, the thresher, the mill, and the press. The ulterior, the ultimate meaning of these plants is *not* their flourishing in the field, but their fate in the bakery, the salad bowl, the wine cellar.

I don't know if Dr Anthony, who was a very holy man, saw into that mystery or not. What I'm sure about is that the future exists which enables us to abandon all our genuine, proper concerns and worries, in favour of a future which may look like contradiction, but which in God's mercy means our salvation, and the absolute fulfilment of our purpose, and our desires.

*To live in this body means to be exiled from the Lord.
We can actually want to be exiled from the body
And find our home with the Lord.*