

30 March 2014

I was in Sydney on Thursday for a conference. I don't travel as much as I used to but there is something I have noticed when I do travel. People don't talk to each other when they travel. In the airport and in the waiting lounge, nearly everyone is looking at their iPhone or iPad. Totally glued and transfixed. You get in the plane and they are still attached. Inside the plane there are iPads in every seat, just in case you don't have enough gadgets in life!! We can be physically close to people and yet have no meaningful contact or warm human interaction. We can literally be hundreds of miles away. So close and yet so far.

On the way home from Sydney on Thursday afternoon, I sat next to a woman one seat away from me. Because I was wearing a collar, she introduced herself and mentioned that she works for the Church in Ballarat at St John of God Hospital. I knew most of the priests she knew in Ballarat because I had studied with them. She spoke very highly of a priest who is a brilliant homilist and excellent communicator. I knew some of the Sisters of St John of God because of my time in Geelong. She chatted to me about her work in Catholic identity and mission, patient support and pastoral care, the mission of a Catholic hospital; she spoke about her own faith journey and her family, etc, etc. Warm, pleasant, human interaction. Technology is a wonderful thing. But I think we human beings are 'wired' not for a screen but wired for each other, wired to be in communion with each other, to interact, to feel better and enriched by our contact with other people, who often show us the face of God.

I mention this because in today's Gospel, Jesus heals the man who was blind from birth. Nothing exceptional here as miracles form an essential part of the ministry of Jesus. But notice how Jesus performs these miracles. He is normally in the presence of someone who suffers, someone who is sick, someone who has some physical deformity or disability that excludes them from society. Jesus comes into their presence; he comes near to them and shares their story. Jesus enters into a profound sense of human interaction and communion. He touches something within these people that moves them to faith; he stirs their hearts and they reach out to him. But before they reach out, Jesus comes even closer. He touches these people and he heals them. Jesus,

the Lord, is not afraid to touch the human brokenness, the physical illness, the wounds of life, the sadness before him. Jesus touches that which is broken and brings hope, healing and love.

The computer is fantastic; the iphone is wonderful; the ipad is very handy. But when we are tired, broken, struggling with life, marginalized and hurt, suffering and with little hope, finding it hard to pray and sometimes doubting the very existence of God, it is not the computer, the iphone or the ipad that will heal us. It is the one who healed the man born blind. It is the one who will give us signs of his grace, reminding us that he is near. It is the one who throughout the whole story of the bible constantly repeats to his tired and broken people who are lost and afraid, "Courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

The journey of Lent and Easter, the journey of the Christian life of faith that comes to us in the waters of Baptism, is the journey to be healed and to be set free. The man born blind is healed and set free. These Gospel stories are not given to us because Jesus is the local celebrity; these Gospel stories are given to us because we are called to reflect on that human brokenness within us, that pain or wound that only God can love and heal, that wound that only God can touch and put right with his life-giving grace and hope.

The author of this prayer knew something about the awesome mystery and healing power of God:

God of high and holy places,  
where I catch a glimpse of your glory,  
above the low levels of life, above the emptiness which drags me down,  
beyond the limits of my senses and imagination, you lift me up.

In the splendor of the sunset, in the silence of the stars, in the grandeur of the mountains, in the vastness of the sea, you lift me up.

In the majesty of music, in the mystery of art, in the freshness of the morning, in the fragrance of a single flower, you lift me up.

Awe-inspiring God, when I am lost in wonder and lost for words, receive the homage of my silent worship but do not let me be content to bear your beauty and be still. Go with me to the places where I live and work. Lift the veil of my reticence behind which I hide. Give me the courage to speak of the things which move me, with simple and unselfconscious delight. Help me to share my glimpses of glory until others are drawn to your powerful and wonderful light.