

“Deep calling to Deep - Divine meeting Divine”.

By Nicole Rotaru

As I write Victorians have moved into ‘lock down’ once again and the whole of Australia is increasingly locking down cities and borders to contend with the next strain of the COVID virus. Once again I am reminded of how contagious this virus is and its capacity to mutate and to expose our vulnerabilities. Recently I read from the document commissioned by Pope Francis, to look at the impacts of COVID. *“The Covid-19 pandemic - the first epidemic to spread globally - has laid bare our physical frailty and immune deficiency in the face of a virus that the human body does not recognize.”*¹

I often have a sense of something at work here that I cannot fully grasp or understand - something beyond the vulnerability and uncertainty that the pandemic brings. A whisper comes, *“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”* Ah! Julien of Norwich steadies me. And Julien, who lived through the Black Plague and came through a life threatening illness came to a deep **‘knowing’**. The underpinning message of the 16 *Revelations of Divine Love* came to her at last: *“Would you learn to see clearly your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Learn it well: Love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love.... Why did he show it to you? For Love’... Thus I was taught that Love was our Lord’s meaning”*².

Love! I think of CEN Members gathering daily at 4.00 pm - or of three of us who meet from time to time at 2.30 pm - sinking into a deep presence to connect with all. A community gathering in quiet and stillness, hearts expanding and moving out in loving kindness, gentleness and compassion to all. The suffering of people, the suffering of our common home – the earth - is held in love in a spirit of contemplative solidarity.

Since childhood there has been a growing awareness in me of the beauty and solace that our “common home” offers. Part of my morning ritual includes ‘greeting’ my plants. After drawing the curtains I usually linger a while and acknowledge my plants. “Thank you beautiful one.” “Do you need some water?” “What do you need to help your flower unfold?” We enjoy a sense of companionship. ‘I am with you’.



Long ago I witnessed my mother’s presence to the various plants and trees in the garden and the calm and serenity she experienced at the end of her day’s work. I would often watch my mother during the summer evenings watering the garden. Hose in hand, mum stood a while at each garden bed moving her hand evenly at the base of the red, yellow, pink, white and orange rose bushes, the lemon tree, the almond tree, the plum tree, the fuchsias, the agapanthus and the hydrangeas. She was intent ...very present... I

¹ Accompanying People in Psychological Distress in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, November 2020 Document commissioned by Pope Francis

² Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter 86

somehow knew this was her time with the flowers, shrubs and trees and I let her be. In the last minutes of twilight mum took time with the fern at the back door. It was a beautiful lush vibrant green. Mum slowly parted the fern fronds, nodded her head to the frog that lived there, and watered carefully. It was a beautiful encounter.

Dad wasn't so keen on the flowers. He had a passion for growing vegetables, especially tomatoes. He told me once, "When I go into the garden I hear them all saying, 'good morning Marin!'" Until his mid-80s dad lovingly tended his 'veggies' and they tended him.

Mum and Dad were deeply connected to the earth. They were attentive to their environment and in many respects experienced a strong interrelatedness. Kevin Gallagher's May CEN reflection, "*Nothing is Profane*" unfolds Teilhard de Chardin's invitation that we be attentive, and quotes from the introduction to *The Divine Milieu*, "*God is as pervasive and perceptible as the atmosphere in which we are bathed.*" What a captivating statement of connectedness!

Those early years of gazing on my mother's connectedness with the earth as she daily encountered plants in her garden, as well as seeing dad's passion for his vegetables are treasured memories for me - as is my morning greeting to my plant 'friends'! "*Laudato Si*"³ expounds on this treasure, starting with this magnificent quote, "*St Francis reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.*" [LS1] Such a tender description!

Attentiveness, interconnectedness and tenderness with our environment were very visible to me in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan where I lived for the first few months of the years spanning 2013-2020. In 2015 six mothers who had heard that their children enjoyed participating in creative arts sessions, also wanted to become involved. Arrangements were made. The women arrived, excited and nervous. We took time greeting one another warmly. The women settled themselves around the large table in the library and looked at what had been set up for their use - blobs of different coloured paint on make-shift cardboard palettes, a variety of paint brushes, and tuna cans filled with water.

'What will we paint?' they asked. 'What is something you really love?' I replied. 'The green' said Hadyia. Heads nodded knowingly all around the table. I wasn't 'knowing'. I did know to listen and wait to learn.

Quickly the other women added what they really loved to Hadyia's 'the green'. After a pause to take in what had been shared, each woman took paper, a palette and brushes and painted what she had described. The women's attentiveness to their work and the delight shining on their faces remain a vivid picture in my mind.

I learned that 'the green' was so all-encompassing of what the women really loved - their families - and that their love was expressed in being able to feed their loved ones. They knew their interdependence with mother earth. They longed and prayed for the rains to come so that they could start to cultivate the land. After the first rains, the women danced as they planted the seeds; their big toes made small holes, the seed was dropped in; their feet carefully covered it with earth. Gratitude filled them as the wet season took hold. They watched and rejoiced as their gardens on the flat land, and mountain sides, transformed into green, green, and more green. With immense joy the women danced up the church aisle to offer the first harvest of sorghum and corn to God. Because of 'the green' they could feed their families. The women's art works and stories below are expressed with simplicity and pride.

³ Pope Francis, '*Laudato si*' - '*Care of Our Common Home*', encyclical published by the Vatican in 2015.

The Green



“We love ‘the green’! The wet season makes our hearts grow big. The rains are blessing. We wait to cultivate,” said Hadyia.

Sorghum



“We think of the sorghum we will plant,” added Gelila.

Corn



“And we plant corn too,” came from Maida.

Black Clouds – Blessing



With great faith and trust, Galatia added, “We wait and long and pray for the black clouds to come and bring many rains.”

Hearts full flowers



Salam explained, “When we cultivate, our hearts are full of flowers. We are happy. We dance and sing as our feet cover the sorghum seeds with the earth.”

We offer to God



“And when the first sorghum and corn is ready we go to offer to God,” smiled Resala.

The Nuba women know well that the earth cares for them. Blessed is their witness to Divine Love at the core of creation permeating its every fibre.

Blessed too is the witness of our Australian Aboriginal Brothers and Sisters who are so deeply connected with the land. It is a relationship utterly fundamental to their very identity, to their spirituality. Miriam Rose Ungunmerr speaks movingly of this connection and the deep listening it calls forth – *dadirri*. “*To know me is to breathe with me. To breathe with me is to listen deeply. To, listen deeply is to connect. Deep calling to deep. The sound of dadirri.*”⁴

How often we hear Aboriginal people speak of ‘connection to Country’ and the attitudes of reciprocity and respect that are intrinsic to their relationship with the land. We are becoming more aware too of the devastating impacts of dislocation from the land – ‘disconnection with country’. Transgenerational trauma is rife in their lives. More of this will come to light during the Truth Telling and Justice Commission launched in this country in May of this year. How challenging it was during that launch to hear Michael Bell, a member of the First People’s Assembly say, “*We had a society, it’s how we lived. We had structures. There was something here before 1770 and that story hasn’t been told.*” And Victorian Premier Daniel

⁴ Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, 2017, Utube: Dadirri the deep inner spring inside us

Andrews followed saying, *“Today has been owed for 233 years. 233 years of violence, dispossession and deprivation. 233 years of deliberate silence. Today we commit to telling the truth.”*

In the final sentence of the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* we hear the heartfelt invitation of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, *“We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.”* ‘Walk with us’!⁵

‘Laudato Si’, exhorts us also, *“We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone...Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning...No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, to our God-given ability to respond to his grace deep at works in our hearts.”*[LS 202, 205]

The presence of grace, the holy energy of the Divine is **within us all**. It is there for us to see - a balm of hope to recognize our vulnerabilities and fragilities; a balm of courage to listen with deepest empathy to the stories of our Indigenous brothers and sisters; a balm of justice that opens us to reconciliation. *“As we transcend ourselves, we become more than we presently are, we become more conscious and we awaken to divine revelation, we accept God’s self-communicating grace into our lives...”*⁶

As I sit with all of these diverse stories, I sense that God’s grace is surely in **all**. The Divine is in the flowers and the trees and the veggies and my plant friends, the green, the corn and the sorghum, the thunder and the rains, and the land...the Divine in my mother and dad and me, in the Nuba women and our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. Deep calling to deep; Divine meeting Divine!

Over the years the CEN reflections have expressed themes that are part of this reflection. I am grateful to each person for putting their thoughts into writing and sharing them with us. Such generosity assists waking up to and seeing the great mystery of the Divine permeating everything and everyone.



⁵ *“Uluru Statement from the Heart – From the Heart”*, Ad.www.fromtheheart.com.au/

⁶ Cannato, Judy, *Field of Compassion*, p 35

