

## A REFLECTION ON LIFE VOWS: Dianne Colborne

This is what a monk once wrote in his journal: "Dance in the sun, you tepid idiot. Wake up and dance in the clarity of perfect contradictions, you fool. It is life that makes you dance. Have you forgotten?"

We have all seen those truly awe-inspiring super-slow-motion images of a flower in its first moments of pushing through the earth and into the sunlight. There is so much movement you would swear the plant is dancing. So much movement, so much life! Whole eco-systems all over our planet.

We are meant to be breathless with awe at the beauty and amazing inter-dependence and intricacies of creation! To treat everything with respect and protect its place on this small, fragile, magnificent planet of ours.

And in that sentence, we have one of the perfect contradictions that the monk wrote about in his journal. Who can forget that image of the blue planet sent back to us from space! Deep in our psyche has been stamped the realisation, as never before, that - for all its magnificence- we live on but a tiny, fragile, round, rotating speck afloat in this vast, vast expanding universe!

But what a planet it is! Just enough oxygen in its atmosphere for us to breathe; just enough sunlight for life to thrive; just enough gravity to keep us all grounded! What an amazing work of art! What choreography! What a Dance!

It is a world where even the tiniest sub-atomic particle cannot exist except if its relationship to other particles and energies remains intact. Nature knows the steps of the Dance!

"I said to the almond Tree, 'Sister, speak to me of God', and the almond tree blossomed."

But what of us? This immense humanity that has been called "the human layer of the earth"! For us the Dance is no different. We exist, live, move, have our being only in relationships. No one thrives without relationship. That is the whole message of Jesus. In spite of all our contradictions and dancing out of step, as the poet tells us, "nature is never spent, for the Holy Spirit o'er the bent world broods with warm breast, and ah! bright wings."

What has all this got to do with Dianne and the choice she has made to live for the rest of her life as a Religious with the vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience? What have these Gospel values to do with nurturing and maintaining a wholesome human eco-system? With people fully human, fully alive? With a magnificent choreography of humanity as dreamed by our Creator?

Well, we can move from awe and wonder and interdependence and the joy of all tumbling out of the Womb of God as sisters and brothers; from the sharing and the knowing that 'with my basket and your basket together', there is enough for everyone - to, I want to keep my own basket! I may even get jealous of what you have in your basket and plan to take it from you! And it's not only possession of things. It overflows to status, recognition, praise, fame, an appetite for celebrity, for glamour. Or, it can turn inwards and become a sense of worthlessness, of 'not good enough' of helplessness and depression. What's the answer? How do we, as individuals and as nations, stay with the steps of the Dance?

Well, one of the movements of this Dance is Gospel Poverty! It is the Christ in us bending down to notice that a flower is clothed with a beauty greater than Solomon in all his glory! Who notices that birds have enough to eat!

It is the Christ in us welcoming children and sinners and prostitutes!

It is the Christ in us who walks an extra mile with our brother, our sister. Who even gives away his own cloak.

It is the Christ in us who notices the generosity of the widow who gives of the little she has!

It is the Christ in us who notices that 'these people have nothing to eat' and does something about it.

It is the Christ in us who becomes gentle and humble of heart!

Gospel Poverty is good medicine, a good well-being exercise, for the health of both our Earth and our humanity today.

As a psychological and spiritual attitude, it is essential. Why? Because it frees us from being afraid of our own greatness, of our own capacity to truly be brothers and sisters to each other. Gospel Poverty never lets ego have the final say. It lets Relationship have the final say. We are slowly getting on to Christ's wave length: "love one another as I have loved you. Father may they be one."

Gospel Poverty frees us from so much that could prevent us from being capable of being fully human, fully alive; of learning the steps of the Dance that Jesus so passionately danced!

And it is this passion that becomes Gospel Chastity, the Dance where each step is a deeper and deeper choice for love, day after day, until union emerges. It is the subtle intensity of Christ at the Last Supper. Christ who came to give life and give it to the full. It is what keeps life unfolding. Whether we are in a life form that includes sexual relationship or one that is celibate, without it we lose connection and fall into self-absorption, self-gratification. We run the risk of disrespecting each other to the point of abuse. Gospel Chastity turns us outward towards the other. To bring joy, life, connectedness is basic to Relationship.

As Mary MacKillop said, "Find happiness in making others happy." It makes us deeply respectful, interconnected, life-giving lovers. Gospel Chastity, with its passion for life, is an amazing energy that is able to include all!

It is Gospel Chastity that is the energy in Jesus that cuts through shallow, token relating to become engaged right to the core of being.

It is the Christ in us who feels grief to the point of tears at the death of a friend.

It is the Christ in us who sees a woman caught in adultery and asks, 'why do you want to stone her, has she not suffered enough?'

It is the Christ in us who sees a woman at the well all alone, without the chatty companionship of other women who are avoiding her. She's lonely. Why would I not connect with her?

It is the quality in Christ that could awaken a soul with the mere calling of a name: "Mary!"

It is the Christ who looks at the diverse group around him at table and is so moved with love he says: "This is my body...my blood, given for you".

It is the Christ in me, listening so profoundly to you that I am moved to Real Presence, unadulterated attention.

Paying attention. Listening. It is this deep listening that transforms into the Gospel value of Obedience. The word obedience comes from the Latin 'ab audire', to listen.

It is what Jesus did as he navigated his way through his humanness, his culture, his time in history, his own deep self. What did he hear? What conclusions did he come to?

What did he hear that made him bend down, write in the sand, remain silent when the authorities challenged him to uphold the law of the day?

What did he hear that urged him to bend down and wash the feet of his friends at the last supper?

What did he hear that kept him on his journey when he sweated blood in the garden?

What did he hear that he offered forgiveness, even while nailed to the Cross, to the thief who many would have considered unworthy?

What did he hear that moved him to be so scathing of hypocrites who made rules for everyone but did not lift a finger to help?

What did he hear that brought him to the conclusion that the great in the kingdom were not those who dominated with power over others, but those who could relate with the stark truth and enchanting warmth of little children?

What did he hear that moved him to pray: "Father, may they be one in us as I am in you and you are in me?"

"Listen to the whispering of God in your own heart", said Mary MacKillop.

To listen, to hear as Jesus heard is Gospel Obedience. It is the high point of the prayer, "Our Father. . . Your Kingdom come. . . Your will be done".

It is what filled St Francis of Assisi with such elation that he sang: "Brother Sun, Sister Moon, I now can hear you, I can hear your tune. I am God's creature, of Him I am part, I feel His love awakening my heart!"

*We have had some things lately that have dismayed us, confused us; abuse, violent domination, narrow-minded exclusions! Bishop convicted, Cardinal jailed! A young man born in Australia, educated in Catholic Schools, shoots 100 worshippers in a mosque in New Zealand; 50 die, 50 are saved.*

*Don't let any of these things rob you of your faith, your hope, your love!  
You know that what we have reflected on here - the Christ of Poverty, of love, of deep attentive listening - is vital to the wellbeing of humanity. Christ is not diminished within you, within us!  
Maybe we just have to turn up the music and dance the Dance more passionately, more lovingly!*

"In a pine tree, just by my window sill, a brilliant blue jay is dancing up and down, up and down, on a branch.  
I laugh as I see her abandon herself to entire delight,  
for she knows as well as I do that the branch will not break."

Dianne, with your vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience, you have chosen to live your life as a Sister of Saint Joseph. Making life vows doesn't mean that the Dance is suddenly danced to perfection. It means that Dianne promises to keep on, step-by-step-by-step. On her alleluia days and when her days turn into blues and greys; when the Dance comes easily and when It comes with difficulty, she promises to hang in and slowly allow the influence of Christ to grow in intensity within her, and therefore, among us.

All of us here are part of the Dance with you, Dianne. All of us brothers and sisters; all of creation, sun, moon, brilliant blue jays and supple branches, together!

And together, humanity today will be closer and closer to hearing the Music, dancing the Dance and increasing Christ's blessed hold upon this unfolding, seeking, loving, stumbling, glorious human layer of the earth!

So Dianne, dance! Dance, for the branch will not break. We celebrate you!

Emilie Cattalini rsj