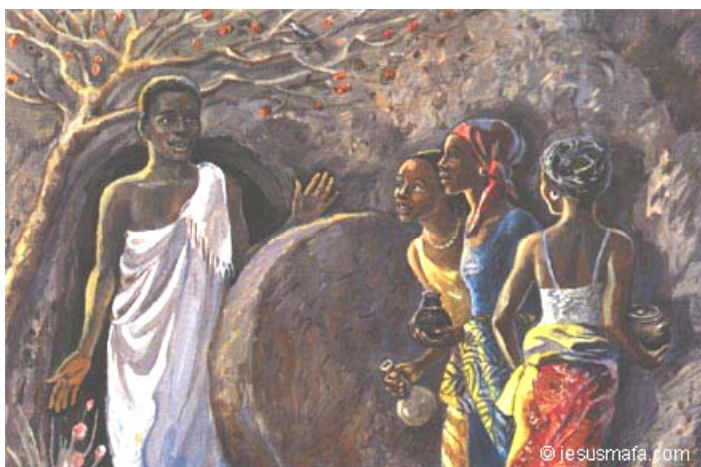


GIFTS

The season of Christmas is more normally associated with the idea of gifts, or the season of Epiphany, to be more liturgically correct.



However, Easter is, par excellence, the season of The Gift.

If you care to look at your own life with a little care and depth, you will very swiftly arrive at the essential mystery.....life is a gift.

Nobody ever fills in an application form to be born. There are no waiting lists, no essential qualifications, no interviews, no waiting for the results to arrive in the post.

By some miracle, as yet unexplained by theology or science, we find ourselves alive and also gifted with the essential equipment for living.

- We have our senses, through which we appreciate the world in which we are set.
- We have our reasoning capacities through which we are able to assess evidence and make judgements.
- We have our family, which launches us safely from infancy to maturity, and this is our springboard for adult and independent living.
- We have our culture which provides us with a context for self-understanding and identity, bringing confidence to develop or change as we see circumstances arise.
- And we have our deeply seated optimism, which helps us to plough our own furrow and make our own mark on the world into which we are born and on the earth on which we are planted.

And all of these are gifts, given to us without any effort on our own part. What we do with them, of course, is the stuff of our life-story. Sometimes we are triumphant and successful. Sometimes, we plunge into the mire and create disasters for ourselves and for other people.

The gift of life is therefore truly a gift, but equally, it is truly a responsibility too.

The responsibilities of life are sometimes experienced as a burden, and sometimes as a natural expression of all that we are and want to be become. It is remarkable how some people find the living out of the gift of life can be so difficult and others find it so smooth and easy.

So, the living of life is as mysterious as the gift of life itself. Indeed, the smooth and easy life may be experienced as less fulfilling than the chequered and difficult life?

A case in point is what we experience in our worship in Holy Week and on Easter Day.

Here we witness a young life brought to a savage and seemingly pointless close by death on the cross. Here we see what appeared like the sudden and catastrophic destruction of hope and goodness. Here we stand by as an undefended man is brutally treated and left to die.

We have been unable to lift a finger to help.

We have stood by and watched it happen, helpless as he was.

Then, like the disciples, we have gone away, shaking our heads and unable to comprehend. The women, anxious to do the decent thing and bury his broken body, come to the tomb very early in the morning.

Only to be surprised by another very unexpected gift.

As powerful and creative as the original gift of life, we have the gift of new life, resurrection life, life-out-of-death, life when there seemed to be no hope, and we are all invited to receive that new life and to accept it as a gift from the love of God, free to us, but won through the crucified love of Jesus Christ on the cross.

This poem is one of a series of 9 which are reflections on St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (chapter 9: 22-23) in which he outlines the nine gifts of the Spirit of God. The poem was written to greet the start of the third Christian millennium. The illustration is by Mell Vandevelde.

Love

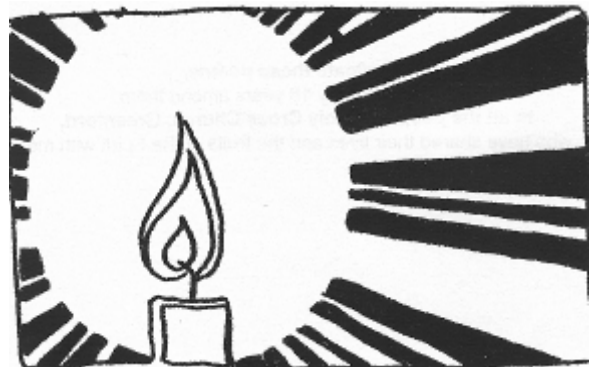
I am love.
I am what you give
when you give yourself.
I am the best gift,
but the biggest risk
that you will ever take.

Loving is godly.
It creates from nothing
and makes life new,
but never claims possession.

Those who give love
will know a sense of loss.
The gift of love is perilous
because it may not be defended.

Fruitful and painful,
loving demands a sacrifice
and always something dies.
But love is greeted by love,
rising again renewed
and ready to embrace the future.

Love holds back,
allowing room for growth.
Love knows its time
but has dominion over death.



NEIL RICHARDSON