



St Mary's
Parish

Serving
the
Community

Serving
the
Family

Serving
the
City



THE GESTURE OF TURNING ALSO DEFINES the poet R.S. Thomas's approach to that elusive, yet most real truth: God. Rather than pursuing or fleeing from him, Thomas waits for God to reveal himself. In "A Bright Field," his exemplar is Moses, who had fled from Egypt forty years earlier and was tending his flock on "the backside of the desert" when he "turns aside" to the burning bush and encounters God. Yet all too often, even when we do turn, God seems absent. Nonetheless, Thomas continues this strange and patient search that is, in the end, a waiting on mystery. In "Mass for Hard Times," he offers the following Gloria: "Because you are not there when I turn, but you are in the turning."

Thomas is a poet of divine silence, a poet who tests "his faith on emptiness, nailing his questions one by one to an untenanted cross," yet paradoxically he also testifies to God's ubiquitous presence. In fact, as William V. Davis reminds us in his commentary on Thomas's work, Protestant churches display an empty, untenanted cross because Christ has risen and is alive. So, in some poems his prayers are answered, God shows up in the silence, and, most surprising, God becomes suddenly "voluble," speaking even through "the machine itself." In several later poems, the cross becomes a "signpost," gesturing us to "turn aside" from our path. "Tell Us," for instance, concludes this way:

You have answered
us with the image of yourself
on a hewn tree, suffering
injustice, pardoning it;
pointing as though in either
direction; horrifying us
with the possibility of dislocation.
Ah, love, with your arms out
wide, tell us how much more
they must still be stretched
to embrace a universe drawing
away from us at the speed of light.

As the universe rushes away, dislocating life as it was known before, the arms of outstretched love encompass all, though invisible to the tools of our creation: "With our greatest modern telescope we look out into the depths of space, but there is no heaven there. With our supersonic aircraft we annihilate time but are no nearer eternity. May it not be that alongside us, made invisible by the thinnest of veils, is the heaven we seek? The immortality we must put on?" writes Thomas in an essay. "It is even closer. It is within us, as Jesus said. That is why there is no need to go anywhere from here."

In stillness, not in frantic action, God will be revealed:

But the silence in the mind
is when we live best, within
listening distance of the silence
we call God.

The blessed irony on which such redirections rely is that when God seems most absent, he is most present. Thomas articulates this mysterious grace in a poem that once again recalls the burning bush:

When we are weak, we are
strong. When our eyes close
on the world, then somewhere
within us the bush burns.

God is at hand, even when we seem utterly alone. And Thomas seeks to cultivate that sense of inadequacy and of our own desperate need that can prepare us to recognize and welcome the uninvited guest.

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The great enemy in this endeavour is the reductive materialism that threatens to enclose us, that renders us blind to the burning bush and deaf to the still small voice. Such materialism assumes that “life, the universe, man are nothing but elaborations of physical laws which can be subsumed under comparatively simple equations.” There is no technology that can break us out of the carapace of such materialism. But between the false allures of history and technology, while the “old men looked back” and the “young forward,” Thomas offers this promise: “love and truth kept their place on the horizon.” Perhaps a poem, with its striking metaphor, its shocking image, its surprising rhythm, might jolt our eyes open to see them there.

(Final edited extract from Jeffrey Bilbro ‘Turn Aside: The Poetic Vision of R. S. Thomas’, *The Plough*, August 2020

Luminary

My luminary,
my morning and evening
star. My light at noon
when there is no sun
and the sky lowers. My balance
of joy in a world
that has gone off joy's
standard. Yours the face
that young I recognised
as though I had known you
of old. Come, my eyes
said, out into the morning
of a world whose dew
waits for your footprint.
Before a green altar
with the thrush for priest
I took those gossamer
vows that neither the Church
could stale nor the Machine
tarnish, that with the years
have grown hard as flint,
lighter than platinum
on our ringless fingers.

-R.S. Thomas (1913-2000)

Parish Life

All masses have now resumed as normal

Weekdays 10am, 12.40

Rosary after 10am Mass

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Wednesday 10.30-12.40

Sundays

**Saturday Night Vigil Mass 6pm, Sunday 9.30am,
11am, 5pm, Croatian Mass 6.30pm**

Church Finances Precarious

An article in the Irish Times this week stated in its title that the income of the Church is ‘in free-fall’ due to the Covid-19 crisis. Certainly the situation everywhere is extremely challenging. The article quotes a spokesperson who states that in the Archdiocese of Dublin ‘income from collections fell by around 80% when churches closed last March.’ the same sources says that since churches reopened in June ‘anecdotally there is a modest improvement in collections, but obviously with reduced numbers permitted at Mass—it is still a very significant challenge.

The Archdiocese has tried to address this critical situation by reducing from the early stage of the pandemic. More recently ‘a voluntary redundancy scheme was introduced for all members in the diocesan support services and parish pastoral workers...with hopes that a third of staff might partake. It was oversubscribed.’ Crosscare, the social services agency. Had begun consultations...around reducing their employer pension contributions rate with a view to reducing expenditure in that area.

While the impression remains that the Church has large resources, this is simply not the case. The simple fact is that parishes in Ireland have always depended on the contributions of the faithful for their survival and this remains the case.

While it is important to keep hope alive and to remain optimistic, it is also true that the present crisis presents an existential challenge to the Church at all levels.

At St Mary’s, we have taken measures to allow parishioners to continue to support the Church, either through donations in the boxes we have made available in the church or online through our website. While there has been some success with these initiatives, the donations have dropped off again in recent weeks and we find ourselves struggling.

While we thank you for your ongoing generosity, we would appeal to all parishioners, within their means, to do with what they can in order to address this difficult situation as the parish continues to serve the church, the family and the city.

(See Patsy McGarry, Irish Catholic Church income in free-fall’, *Irish Times*, September 6 2020)

IN MEMORIAM

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6pm Vigil mass, Sean Hanaphey
11am, Bernie Guerin

Masses on 19-20 September

6pm Vigil Mass, Tina Gaffney, anniversary

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