

In a delightful collection of poems entitled ‘Why I wake Early’, Mary Oliver touches on many of the themes that come together in today’s celebration: remembrance, division, glory, judgement. We remember the dead of all too many wars and our own more familiar loss; we remember Mary Oliver’s home country, struggling now to overcome huge divides, and those increasingly evident in our own; we relish the glory of victory, both in past wars and present elections, but fear the judgement that this also brings. Did we back the right cause, the just person, the truth? And will our actions be worthy of our lives? We are called to be awake to all such possibilities and particularly to wisdom at our door.

*Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less

thrills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.
It is what I was born for —
to look, to listen,

to lose myself,
inside this soft world —
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation...*

Mary Oliver finds this watchfulness rewarded in the smallest details of life and this is her salvation, her way of coping with the greater losses that inevitably assail us. She grows wise:

*with such teachings
as these -
the untrimmable light

of the world,
the oceans shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?
(Mindful)*

If this seems too worldly, remember Paul’s ambivalence about whether it was better to stay or to go to the Lord. The Lord is to be found, or rather finds us, wherever we are. In ‘Soul at Last’, Mary Oliver touches on this, too:

*The Lord’s terrifying kindness has come to me
It was only a small silvery thing – say a piece
of silver cloth, or a thousand spider webs*

*woven together, or a small handful of aspen
leaves, with their silver backs shimmering.
And it came leaping out of the closed coffin;
it flew into the air, it danced snappingly
around the church rafters, it vanished through
the ceiling.*

*I spoke there, briefly, of the loved one gone. I
gazed at the people in the pews, some of them,
weeping. I know I must, someday, write this
down.*

As Paul too will write of his experience of sudden glory. We are ensouled and, in a sense, already in God: part of a unity greater than death. Only some know it, and some don't.

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