

We have been acting the last few days ‘as if’ Christ were dead and ‘as if’ Christ is risen and ‘as if’ God exists – and that ‘as if’ is very important. Here it is in the words of the naturalist and natural history writer Richard Mabey in entirely secular terms. A few years ago, he suffered a profound depression after completing his monumental and magnificent work ‘Flora Britannica’ and ended up, ironically, in the same mental health hospital in Northampton as one of his biographical subjects, the poet, John Clare, though he was in no fit state to realise this at the time or to look after himself when he emerged, until friends took charge of him and, with great care and discipline, helped him to get better which he describes as follows:

*Slowly and laboriously, I began to improve. My weight dropped off and I started to breathe properly again. I wrote a postcard, I noticed the smell of broad beans. Playing the part of a well person, pretending that there might be a future, made it happen, little by little. The performance became a shell – an embodiment – in which feeling could begin to happen again. (p.60 Nature Cure)*

Now, I used this earlier today in a talk on Chapter 68 of the ‘Rule of St. Benedict’ *when a brother is commanded to do the impossible* and it struck me that when a monk or nun finds themselves in this position, commanded by their superior to return to their work, even if it seems impossible, they are entrusting themselves to the wisdom and love of another – that is, to the dynamic of faith. They are called to act ‘as if’ it’s going to be all right, ‘as if’ the Abbot knows what he is talking about and acts out of love and ‘as if’ God exists and is benign. As Christ is confined in a tomb for three days so, when we are forced to come up against the boundaries of our own selves: all these limitations which we fear will hold us in constraint forever and will define us as who we really are, so, an attitude of faith, of believing in what appears impossible one might say, can allow God’s power to work in us, give God free play in both our daily dying and rising. It’s as if this dynamic is what creation is all about. And we don’t need to blame the Jews in order to recognise this as so.

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