

Physiotherapists encourage people experiencing relentless post-viral fatigue to gently push at the limits of what they can do in terms of physical effort. They've found that if those limits are not tested, then the realm of the possible begins to shrink – horizons contract, muscles weaken and sufferers can become trapped in a cycle of effort followed by collapse. The effort required to prevent each collapse begins to dwindle.

(Gavin Francis. *Guardian* 4/1/22)

What a marvellous metaphor for what happens to us when our spiritual horizons begin to atrophy. When, instead of 'working away at the edges of our freedom', we enter and encourage a cycle of decline – whether, indeed, religious, physical or moral or even economic and political. Without vision we die; without a story to live by we die. Today's story of the Epiphany is given us to raise our sights, spur us on, teach us that the limits of our possibility are greater than we've imagined. That our faith is in a God who has kinship with all: that our tiny, sad Christianity has a story to tell which is absolutely and always against the culture of its time – that is, the entrapment within worldly values only: the cycle of impoverishing one another to enrich the few; the abasement before the gods today of social media e.g., of a cultivated inattention to rob us of our freedom and true identity. This prompted by a recent article in the Observer entitled *Focus (if you still can)* where the causes of the attention deficit disorder we all now suffer from are laid bare. It's structural, systemic – a question of power-play, just as we see in the example of Herod in today's gospel: forces which desire to control as opposed to forces which desire to set us free. And we are so readily seduced by such forces to the point where we lose all sense of peace and self-worth. The author of this article decides to de-tox from the madness of it all and spends three months off, alone, in a sort of retreat at the tip of Cape Cod.

Normally I follow the news every hour or so getting a drip-feed of anxiety-provoking facts and trying to smush them together into some kind of sense. Instead, I simply read a physical paper once a day. Every few hours, I would feel an unfamiliar sensation gurgling inside me and I would ask myself: what is that? Ah, yes. Calm.

(Johann Hari: *Observer* 2.1.22)

Ah, yes, so that's what Christmas is really all about: becoming aware of the stars again and of those gentle promptings of the Spirit, and sometimes not so gentle, which tell us to follow this path or that, and which if we do follow, bring us all to peace. This is an epiphany worth having. Use it or lose it, as they say.

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