

In Anne Enright's perhaps partly autobiographical novel *The Green Road*, tracing the journey of a very diverse Irish family born and bred in County Clare in the late 20th Century, there's a dramatic conclusion where the mother disappears into the dark on Christmas Day and the much divided family eventually notice and begin a desperate search. She always was a difficult woman but this, and their differences, are now forgotten.

Rosaleen's children stood peering and calling into the black air. She was somewhere out there and it was unbearable. Their concern was also a concern for themselves, of course. Some infant self, beyond tears. Dan felt it like a whiteness inside his chest. A searing want 'Rosaleen!'

Even Ernest was surprised by the force of it, this huge need for a woman he did not think he liked any more. 'Mam! Mam!'

Constance ran to the nearest wall and looked over it as if her mother was a dropped wallet or a set of keys. 'Mammy' she said .

The comedy of it was not lost on them, the fact that each of her children was calling out to a different woman. They did not know who she was – their mother, Rosaleen Madigan – and they did not have to know. She was an elderly woman in desperate need of their assistance and even as her absence grew to fill the cold mountainside, she shrank into a human being – any human being – frail, mortal, old

They stood facing, north, north-west, west their shadows swapping on the road in front of them while Hanna's voice came in a wisp of sound across the land 'Mama!'

Mama, Mammy, Mam, Rosaleen – same person, different names: same God, different persons. Most of us, most of the time are in the dark as to who God is and who *we* are in relation to God, but we are given occasional clues and these clues are given to us not firstly, primarily, through any intellectual search which we see, in Nicodemus's case, has only served to blind him, to keep him in the dark – but through a lived experience. Moses comes to God on the mountainside in a desperate search, or a desperate calling on the name of the Lord to save his people, those whom he, Moses, loves despite their difficult nature, their waywardness – and he identifies himself with them, such is his love:

True, they are a headstrong people, but forgive us our faults and our sins and adopt us as your heritage.

(You see how Moses mirrors God here)

Now, I'm not going to spoil the book by telling you its ending: whether Rosaleen is found dead or alive, or found at all, or whether the family remains united at this very primal level, but I would suggest that it's their desire to search for Rosaleen which

has saved them, and will save Nicodemus too. For it's an act of love, and in that act we not only find God but we find ourselves too: *some infant self, beyond tears.*

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