

A few weeks ago, there were at least two Song Thrushes in full song in our garden and in lots of other places, too. It was in November, after several sharp frosts, and now they are silent again and nowhere to be seen. It's easy to conclude from this that Winter has finally finished them off but silence doesn't necessarily mean absence and, from past experience, my guess is that having advertised their summer territories to one another for one last time they are in the hedgerows, now, holding winter territories instead. Thomas Hardy famously incorporated this ambivalence of meaning into his poem *The Darkling Thrush*.

The thrush sings at the lowest point of the year and at his own lowest point and the poet doesn't really know what to make of it.

*So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good- night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.*

Many commentators would see this as a sign of further despair rather than hope against hope. *What's it got to be so cheerful about?* But the song-thrush isn't being cheerful. It's telling its competitors very clearly, 'I'm leaving this place now, but watch out! I'm going to be back next year'. Silence, then, doesn't mean future absence, though of course, it may.

None of us knows what this year will bring but we sing in defiance of the elements – of the elemental power. It's a choice inspired, not firstly, by reason, or even by biology, but by the draw of another power reaching out to us to draw us on, to give us hope against hope, hope against reason or, better, reason for hope. So many great artists struggle with depression and ill-temper in their search for meaning and can give us hope in this respect because of the great art they produce. But the greater hope is in this draw towards a greater power which it is not within *our* power to control but only to respond to; this draw which is occasioned by God's already reaching out to us in all of creation, including the Song-thrush, including Christ: the power that makes us cry out 'Abba Father!' as children of God.

We sing, then, not because it's good for us, though it is, but in response to a call that tells us that, come what may, God is with us in both silence and song. We sing now for the time when we cannot.

Mother of God pray for us

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