

“ When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand. “

We had a psychoanalyst present with us for many years as a group conductor on our degree training programme. He was a “ proper gentleman”, public school trained I think, with impeccable manners, unassuming, approachable and with the great gift of imparting dignity to others. He kept a teddy bear in his bed to remind him of his young daughter – under her orders I think – (we discovered that when he once forgot to take it with him) and on departure if he saw me in the courtyard waiting for everyone to go he would stop his car, get out, come over, look me in the eye and say thank you for all I/we had done. He could so easily have stayed in the car, given a wave, shouted a greeting perhaps and driven off, eager to get home to his family and his daughter. But no, he had dignity enough to affirm my dignity as a fellow human being. This is the sign of a free person, of one who knows how to love and to know that because he has been loved in turn. This isn't about any sort of quid pro quo – I love you so that you will love me – but rather a recognition of our original dignity before God, made indeed in God's image and worthy of respect, worthy of love whatever our sinful condition which naturally obscures it, this original relationship in which we stand freely before God with our heads held high. We stand during the Eucharist as a sign of this original dignity, able to look both life and death in the eye. We get out of the car to stand before Christ or God, or better perhaps we stand as Christ before God. This is awesome, this is part of the integrity we have as human beings, part of a mystery, the mystery of the holy which can only be approached with a holy fear, with the humility that is, that the true awareness of our dignity inspires. We are also talking then about grace – the free flow of god's love for us through one another. This is the relationship Christ calls us into in the most personal way possible – as one human being to another, in the one sacrifice of the Mass taken up into the movement of Christ's self- offering. The wonder then of that act of humility which is at the same time a re- affirmation of our original worthiness before God and one another. This is what we have to look forward to at the Christ mass of Christmas, at the coming of Christ, the restoration of that dignity so readily lost by sin but now forgiven in Christ. Worth a teddy bear or two in remembrance – the humility that is to remember what God has done for us in Christ.

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