

***“Love From Your Centre”***

**(Romans 12.9-21)**

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***Introduction***

*“Love from the centre of who you are;  
don’t fake it...  
Don’t burn out; keep yourself fuelled and aflame.”*

From early on, I understood that central to faithfulness... is to love without constraint. This is at the very heart of being a good Christian – to be generous and sacrificial in loving others. And so from my late teenage years on... I threw myself into it... especially in my desire to be a good priest. Decades of striving... trying to be more loving than I really was.

This love was effort-full... hard work. Often an act of discipline – I *must* love my parishioners... indeed I *must* be *perfect* in that love. Paul’s words sound harsh – “*don’t fake it*” – because I so much wanted to be loving... I didn’t want it to be *pretending*. But because I was trying to be more... to be better... than who I really was... yes, I guess it too often was *fake*... me living out a role that I thought was expected of me.

It was well intentioned... but always confused with my personal needs – to be recognised, to be successful, to be approved of. So my love was never entirely free. I was trying to give myself to people, but deep inside in the dark places of my wounding, there was that terrible voice screaming, ‘*But what about me?*’

It was *striving*... and so burn-out always came. Indeed it was a repetitive cycle:

- trying really hard;
- followed by some sort of crash... ‘*I can’t do this any more!*’;
- in this there would be some sort of surrender... and I’d start to feel better again...
- but nothing had really changed in me... so back I’d go to the striving...

and the cycle would repeat again.

My story is coloured by this odd work of being a parish priest... but does that experience have any resonance in your life? Has this played out in your life anywhere? Perhaps you still experience it now...

It's quite different for me now. I rarely go back to that pattern. The Spirit was at work in all this, and slowly, torturously I *did* learn. And so now... I give what I can – no more and no less. I accept the constraints of my imperfect reality.<sup>1</sup> I love as I can... My loving service is nowhere near as heroic or impressive as it was as a young priest... but it's much more dependable and steady now... because it *is* genuine. I don't crash and burn any more.<sup>2</sup>

I'm learning how to allow love to emerge from the deepest part of me... not from the noisy needy ego camped in my mind... but from the centre of who I truly am.

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### **The Centre**

*"...the centre of who you are..."* Where is that? *What* is that?

*Centre* is a good word... expressive. There are others we use in the Christian tradition – *heart... essence... true self*. And recently I've gone back to the ancient Christian word... **soul**... Where is the soul? *What* is the soul? (I'm not sure I understand this *metaphysically*, but I've got some sort of grasp *experientially*.)<sup>3</sup>

Inside the human person there is a lot of 'noise'... all sorts of voices, some shouting, others more strategic and manipulative... all trying to control our awareness... like a jumble of 'little personalities' trying to get hold of the steering wheel of our life. (Just sit quietly for 5 minutes and they'll reveal themselves...) Even when we're not aware of them, they're present, active and potent... 24/7. And

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<sup>1</sup> If you hear the words carefully, I'm happy to say, "I accept the constraints of my **sinful** reality."

<sup>2</sup> When I feel myself starting to push too hard, I step back a little... take a rest... and review what's happening.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent book about the soul is *"The Untethered Soul"* by Michael Singer.

none of them are who we really are... They're all the construct and legacy of our childhood and our culture. It's just noise...

Underneath that jumble and cacophony... deep in the centre of 'us' as people... is the soul... quiet... watching... waiting. The soul is untouched by the noise – it is not in any way constructed by society or experience. For the soul is one with God – created by and in God at the beginning... always there. And the soul is our true identity... who we truly are. The soul sits beneath the noise and the busyness, quietly and patiently waiting for us to notice... to discover.

The soul *loves* naturally... effortlessly... genuinely. The soul loves without any *need* attached. The soul doesn't need to prove anything, or achieve anything... because it has all it 'wants'... and it knows who it is.

And so Paul says,

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### ***Jesus and Losing Our Soul***

There is nothing more critical to living a truly good and fulfilling life, than *finding our soul*. It's always there... waiting... But sadly, many people – maybe it's *most* – go through life without ever connecting. Indeed Jesus chillingly said, that if we're not careful... we can actually lose our soul.

It's what he's saying to us in today's Gospel (Matthew 16 25-26)... paraphrased...

*'The danger is, you'll end up achieving, acquiring, doing **everything**... all the glittering baubles the culture offers... and end up losing your soul in the process. What profit is there in having everything, and yet losing your **true self**... who you actually are... in the process?'*

Central to the Way of Christ Jesus is allowing the *false self* to die, in order that the *true self* (the soul) may emerge.

### ***Soul Connection***

*Re-connecting with our soul* is essential for those of us who want to experience the abundant life of Christ.

*How do we re-connect with our soul?* That's the work of many years and way too much for a single sermon, but here are a few simple beginning steps...

- We need to become aware of all those 'little personalities' inside... our false self... and start to let them slide away. They need to die, Jesus says. And this will take some practice of intentional reflection.
- And we'll only start to hear the voice of our soul, when we're prepared to sit in silence – to stop rushing around and to listen instead. All of us need to learn to pray as Christ Jesus prayed – alone and in silence – not talking, not asking but waiting... listening... open and undefended. Waiting for the small still voice of the soul to emerge from way down deep within.
- You'll know when you connect with your soul... mainly because of 'The Calm' that surrounds it... and because it speaks only of love.

There is what the tradition calls *equanimity* when we're connected to our soul. This is NOT a promise of a privileged, pain-free life... but rather that we can accept (even welcome) suffering and loss with calm and trust... in *equanimity*. For the soul is not afraid. The soul is one with God... so there is no loneliness... no need... no fear. And because the soul is essentially LOVE... the soul loves naturally... freely.

### **Conclusion**

Paul is spot on... When we're in connection with our centre, our soul... love flows easily... authentically... with no risk of contamination or burn-out. For the soul is created in pure love... the soul is essentially love... and it knows no other reality.

Put aside all the striving after stuff that's never going to pay off... and instead... go searching for your soul. And when you find it... love from there!

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