

Reflection on “Excerpt from Letters to a Young Poet” by Rilke

Who am I in this relationship with God? Who am I if I haven't been able to find my access to God in the usual way? As it's been months – do I feel far from God and this relationship? So much feels like it's changed. I don't know where to start. What if we are starting to come back to church and I don't know where I fit? What will it look like? What will I look like as part of this? I feel a bit guilty because I haven't been doing “church” in the way I usually do and now it looks like we're coming back and actually I feel a bit lost with it all.

These are just some of the questions and thoughts I have been asking myself these past few weeks as we've been looking toward opening up church for private prayer as part of us easing out of lockdown.

Perhaps some of them sound familiar. Perhaps your questions and thoughts are slightly different.

The fact is we all have questions in some shape or form about what has gone on. And you know what? That's ok. That's why I thought I'd share some of mine with you. It's ok to perhaps feel unsettled, or a bit discordant with what's happened and what will happen and where we will all fit somehow when it's all a bit different. A lot different.

It's ok because God hears our thoughts. He is close to us. He knows our hearts and so he knows our worries better than we do. I get the feeling that when I bring my anxieties to him in whatever form (and sometimes they have taken an age to tease out before I feel able to say them out loud to Him) sometimes I get the feeling He has been waiting patiently for so long for me to come to Him with them, that there is a great sense of relief in the air when I finally show up weighed down by my worries and fears. It's a sense of relief that comes from both of us – a sense of lightness from me because I have finally been honest with where I am at (even though I know He knows already) and a sense that He is saying to me “I'm glad you came. Come in. Let's be together for a bit.”

And so, the deepening of the relationship can begin. Again.

I wonder if you took a look at some of the passages from the booklet sent out yesterday? Did you get a chance to read through and perhaps choose one that resonated with you? One of my favourite pieces of prose is the one from Rilke, I have it in print on my wall and it is one that I share often. Today I am sharing it with you.

*How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples,
the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses;
perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses
who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave.
Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants
help from us.*

*So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises up before you
larger than any you have ever seen; if a restiveness, like light and cloudshadows,
passes over your hands and over all you do.
You must think that something is happening with you, that life has not forgotten you,
that it holds you in its hand; it will not let you fall.*

I first heard it on an American TV show of all places – in the late 1980s. It was on just after dinner time and I can remember half watching it – the story of an unlikely relationship – a half man half lion played by Ron Perlman who lived underground and who was in love with a beautiful NY woman played by Linda Hamilton. In one of the episodes he read the Rilke prose to her. It stopped me in my tracks. I had to listen. Something made me listen closer.

Rilke's words gave me a tiny insight into that relationship we have with all our difficulties. We are individuals who live in relationship with all things – with God and each other yes, but also with all the good we encounter during our lifetime and with all the difficulties we endure. Our lives are an ongoing dance of relationships – sometimes the steps are together and sometimes they are misplaced, but the music remains the same – because the music comes from God. Sometimes we can dance to it with fervour and vigor, hearing each note clearly and in sequence – rather like the metre of a beautifully written poem or song when everything flows and rhymes perfectly. Other times we can stumble a bit as if we were trying to decipher a hastily scribbled note or trying to read too many hastily scribbled notes all at once.

Rilke's words gave me permission to feel what I need to feel. To see my anxieties and fears for what they are, but also to acknowledge that they are a part of who I am, not to deny them. To deny them is to deny a part of myself and so how then could I come "wholeheartedly" to my relationship with God. The words Rilke wrote to the young poet helped me to understand that I need to have a relationship with all of who I am, and in that line where he says: "Life holds you in its hand. It will not let you fall." I believe that here that he means God – that I am part of the life on this planet, a part of God's wondrous creation, fully integrated into the whole, in relationship with everything and everyone and so when I think about that it helps me to trust in God's ways – it helps me to believe that I am supported, loved and cared for in a myriad of ways I don't even see half the time, most of the time. Those words help me to know that God "has it" he holds it – he holds it all, even when I can't, especially when I can't and that I am held as part of the whole.

So I've shared a little of my favourite piece of prose with you today – there is so much more could be said but I encourage you to think about your relationship with the whole, about your relationship with everything around you, with your family, friends, neighbours, me, but especially with God.

Know that he loves you and that, like me, he holds you, he holds us together in his unending and unfathomable love.