



Sister Cecilia Goodman CJ 1946-2017

by Tony Lester O.Carm

It is a great privilege for me to be here to share one or two thoughts with you in this moment when we remember and give thanks for the life of a great woman, teacher, guide and friend. Cecilia was all of these and more to those of us who are gathered this afternoon and to the many more whose hearts and minds will be turned toward us and to this place in this moment, but who cannot be here themselves.

I am very grateful to Cecilia's community for the invitation to be here and need to apologise to them that I have been somewhat hard to track down, or perhaps better, to pin down. This moment finds me mid-sabbatical and so the promise given with the invitation to give a homily on the reading of my choice led, through my lack of attention to emails, to one being chosen for me and that is the reading from Matthew 13 which we have just heard.

As it is the reading I would have chosen is the one from Ephesians which we have also heard so I am doubly blessed and provided for.

However, before I turn to the scriptures, I would like briefly to make public a word of thanks and appreciation to Cecilia on my own behalf. Cecilia was coming to the end of her own time as provincial superior of her congregation in England when the lot fell to me to fulfil the same role in my own religious family. Her kindness to me in that process of adjustment, enabled by her own deep knowledge of what the call to this particular ministry of service would mean and, indeed, cost was a precious gift. She did this with no great sense of show or, in the great words of that great Yorkshireman, Alan Bennett, splother! but with a quiet presence of one who knew, understood and was alongside. It is a kindness I will always remember.

The reading from Matthew with its sense of nature with references to seeds and growth and birds and nesting and coming to full stature fits well with Cecilia's love of nature and, indeed, her eye for beauty. I think that it also works in a different way. The reign of God is a place of welcome and hospitality where people can come to be at home. It is an image of a God who invites us to be that welcome, to be the hospitality of God. Where this welcome and hospitality are made present then God's reign is visible and can be touched and shared.

In order for this welcome to be true and for this hospitality to be real, the person welcomed must know them self to be known, seen and loved as they are in their deepest truth. It is a place of divine encounter because, our tradition says, that God is both in the welcome and in the one welcomed. It is a place of mystery where sometime silence is the only language which can speak with sufficient grace of the love which is present and shared.

Both from my own experience and from the experience of many others Cecilia's life and ministry enabled this welcome and encounter in a way which was uniquely hers and which extended beyond our too often narrow boundaries of denomination or faith.

To her own religious family where she was serving at the time of her death in that most important of all ministries, the formation of new members; to the many who came to her through her ministry at St. Bede's and to those who simply knew of her by word of mouth as a wise and trustworthy friend on the journey; Cecilia was a sure guide.

A tree in the full stature of its growth where the birds of the air make their nests and their homes and raise their young!

Any tree needs roots that grow to support the tree in its strength and in times when the storms arise and strike at it and Cecilia was no stranger to such storms. She was, however, a woman firmly rooted in her own tradition as a Christian and as a religious in the Congregation of Jesus. It was, precisely, because she was so well rooted that she had no need to seek refuge in the spurious certainties offered by religious structures which it can so often seem to be more about exclusion than welcome and hospitality.

Hers was a fidelity to a person and not to a church or system. Her scope was nothing less than that those whom she was alongside should know the breadth and the length and the height

and the depth, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and to be filled with the fullness of God.

The work of the director and spiritual guide is to approach the other with profound reverence for the work which God is bringing about in the depth of that person, in the core of the personality, in that place where the individual is most themselves. The word which we sometimes use for that unique and most intimate place is soul. The place where we are wholly known and loved by God but which we struggle to know.

Cecilia was able to listen because she was welcome and she was so because she had come to know the one who knew her and called her from the first moments of her life and the one who has now called her to life in its fullness.

Not every religious tradition has the practise of prayer for the dead though it is very much a part of the catholic and orthodox Christian traditions.

For orthodox Christians this prayer is also a commitment for this lifetime. As we pray for the one who has died so we commit to keeping alive the gifts the person brought and which are lost to us in this life in their death.

So as our service here draws to its close with all that we have heard and shared and as we leave this place perhaps we can resolve, each in our own and unique way to do just that. To allow our prayer and remembering to translate, not into continuing simply her work, but her way of being.

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May our sister Cecilia rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen!