The World Community for Christian Meditation

Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (http://www.wccm.org)

Tablet - September 09

There are some things that we cannot and should not even try to explain.

Early one grey morning when the family was all asleep the phone rang. L?s husband was being called by a friend to see if he could take the place of a member of the crew who had had to drop out suddenly from a fishing boat trip. He did not feel like leaving his warm house on a cold wet morning, nor did L want him to go.

But he obeyed the ancient sense of loyalty and solidarity, instilled in him through the community of the sea which is awakened by the needs of others.

The forecast was not good but the weather was rarely on their side anyway. On this occasion the indifference of nature took a tragic toll. A bad storm hit the boat when they were making for land and they capsized. L?s husband, father of two young children, was lost, his body swept out to sea and never recovered. His companion managed to reach the foot of the cliffs on which the boat foundered and climbed up the sheer rockface to safety.

L was not the first woman in the area to hear the news that took the ground from under her feet and smashed her life like a dropped vase, that her husband had been lost at sea. When this happens the women, like the sailors, do not shake their fist or rage at the ocean or at God. They don?t look for someone to sue. Nor do they understand why them, why now?; but they accept. L was supported by her family and friends and her love for her children. The tides of life changed and she carried on.

Late one night a year or so later she got another call. Her nineteen year old son, a boy that she and everyone in town loved, a young man who like his father was always ready to drop what he was doing to help someone who needed him, would not be coming home ever again. With two friends he had been drowned ? not because a fishing boat sank but because a car had oddly slipped over a jetty into a few feet of water and trapped them by their seat belts. The tragedy of the three young men briefly became national news. The local priest was on the scene with the emergency services in the early hours. The local community was in trauma.

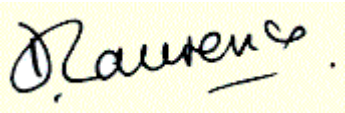
There were two survivors who said that they had been in the car and had managed to escape. They drove to the town three miles away, past houses, and called for help from the pub. At the inquest there were many unasked and many unanswered questions. What really

happened to cause the accident? What were the reasons for the subsequent behaviour of the two survivors? Why was part of the security camera on the site of the accident missing footage for that part of the night? Questions that L needed to have investigated and which, a year later, have returned to torment her with a compulsive force. Her lawyer told her that the inquest did not adequately address these issues and a further investigation was obviously called for. He also told her it would run to thousands to pursue it privately because the authorities, having closed the case, would not.

She sees the two survivors, if that is the right word for them, in town from time to time. They look away when they see her and have never spoken to her about the night her son died. L however is not looking for revenge. Usually when people accept tragedy and enter the silence of the cloud of unknowing that death pulls around us, it is truth not punishment that they are looking for. L has the air of a character in an ancient tragedy, cloaked in a great solitude and, without thinking herself special, a sense of detachment from everything ordinary and superficial. She reminds me of Antigone waiting for the proper funeral rights to honour her dead brother but forbidden by the prince who has ordered his body to decay in the dust outside the walls.

L knows she is passing through the storm of her loss. Numbness is passing, the insistent questioning has started; but she trusts in pure, painful silence that all will eventually be resolved. Her faith is opening to the totality of the mystery of life that embraces good and bad, leading her towards true wisdom.

Those in town who have the answers that would give her peace now, however, inhabit a different kind of silence, of denial and evasion. Their tragedy is different from hers. Her silence makes those with her silent too. Theirs triggers a visceral roar for justice.



Laurence Freeman OSB

Laurence Freeman is a Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Monte Oliveto and also Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org)

Tablet Newsletter

Source URL: http://www.wccm.org/content/tablet-september-09