

Cry of the True Self

'I know that only the Lord God can and will loose my fetters and open my door, and that only His creative storm will unfurl my flag once again...' FR Alfred Delp

In the film 'Before Sunset', Ethan Hawke muses to an ex-lover as to why he left her for another in order to become a husband then father: 'I chose my best self over my honest one.' Moments later, 'honesty' overtakes him and he tumbles into bed with his old flame.

Much is made today about such 'honesty'—as if getting real with your bad self is virtuous. We portray 'best' selves as sexless and stodgy; 'honest' selves warrant sweeping sound-tracks and soft porn montages. Raising the banner of authenticity, men and women break their vows to God and each other in order to fuse with a sweeter fix. 'To thine own self be true' is the adulterer's creed--forsaking all others for a better conversation or orgasm.

So Sue ditches husband and kids for Jim. Or for Jenny. Gender does not matter much here; what does is waking up for a few mornings with someone who 'gets you' and is happy for you 'to get' him or her, sensationally.

Authentic adultery. We've all encountered it with close friends and possibly came close to agreeing with: 'That marriage died a long time ago; finally she found her soul-mate', or 'He's always been gay and now is free...' When we romanticize the needs of one to the exclusion of others, we contribute to the abandonment of a host of dependents who actually need Mom and Dad to reach for their best.

Advent provokes us to become our best. John the Baptist heralds the true self based wholly on the person of Jesus Christ. He cries out three times and urges us to do the same: 'In your desert, prepare the way of the Lord... In your withering, the Word of God stands forever... Here is your God; He comes with power!' (IS 40:3-10)

The Baptist, inflamed by the soon-coming King, implored his followers to turn from sin and toward the One who incinerates all falsehood to expose gleaming truth (LK 3: 16, 17). That self emerges only through authentic encounter with Jesus Christ. Jesus forges a true self out of our temptations; He summons our best from honest confession of our lower possibilities.

John confronts us with a glimpse of Glory, before whom we flee or surrender. Jesus gives us the choice to agree with Him before He knocks us off our high horse of disordered dreams—myths of contours that complement ours perfectly.

He levels us to the ground in order to raise us according to His best for our lives. This is the authentic self who lives for Him and who endures whatever limits us creatures impose on each other. Love frees us for serving others gratefully. We are most real—most alive to the truth of who we are--when we live from His wellspring in order to help quench the thirst of others.

From a prison cell on the eve of his execution, Advent '44, Delp wrote:

'Human honesty requires man to see himself as a servant and perceive his reality as a mission and an assignment. The idea of authentic service and authentic duty belongs to the essence of man's self-concept. Anyone who undermines this has smeared his own image and corrupted his own self-knowledge...

What man contributes to his own great liberation into a fulfilled life consists of honest humility, willing openness, readiness to serve, authentic testimony, and praise. If man sets out upon his Advent road, he will be granted the great encounter, for man's liberation happens as an encounter. God works a multi-faceted liberation within him, meeting him when he rises beyond self in a lived experience of being comforted and uplifted.' (*Advent of the Heart*, Ignatius Press)

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