

All life and all living is an undo-able network: it is an infinitely rich web of relationships and circumstances. If my grandmother had not moved herself and her family from Dublin to East London, I wouldn't be writing this homily – in fact, I wouldn't even exist. It seems such an obvious thing to say, but the implications are totally awesome. Human lives, over thousands of years, become inextricably linked and each one of us affects every other life in a way that we can never comprehend or even know. Physically, this has come to be known as the 'butterfly effect'; the mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz derived it from the metaphorical example of the details of a tornado (the exact time of formation, the exact path taken) being influenced by minor disturbances such as a distant butterfly fluttering its wings several weeks earlier. Scientifically put, it means that a small change in one system can result in a much larger change in a later state of that system. In fact, the interconnectedness of all life has always been known to the questioning mind; much earlier, in his 1800 book *The Vocation of Man*, the German philosopher Johann Fichte said:

“You could not remove a single grain of sand from its place without thereby... changing something throughout all parts of the immeasurable whole.”

This is precisely because life *is* a whole, and not just a conglomeration of assorted parts; both physically and spiritually, we are made of the same stuff.

The great American Indian Chief, Seattle, has said:

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”

The damage human beings have inflicted upon the planet is a direct result of ignoring the fact that all the infinite manifestations of life are bound together in a single shared existence. The slow death of the rainforests – which are the lungs of the earth – is a fatal symptom of this.

Even more significantly, our interconnectedness is also *spiritual* – in fact, it is first and foremost spiritual; the vast web of physical life simply reflects this. The butterfly effect, you see, is spiritual before it is ever physical. It isn't possible for someone to sin without dragging the whole world fractionally away from God with him; and it isn't possible for someone to do good without lifting the whole world fractionally closer to God with him. And the nature of our spiritual interconnectedness is love: love holds everything together.

We experience this as a journey, a process of inward growth and development from ignorance to understanding, error to truth, isolation to relationship, from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. Slowly, we grow into an awareness that we are not alone, nor can we ever be: soul is connected to soul, spirit to spirit, just as a blade of grass is not separate from a distant star.

The physicist Daryll Reaney wrote:

“The universe is one in a way that we can hardly imagine. Our very bodies are made of exactly the same raw material as the most distant galaxies; they consist, if you like, of stardust.”

This is true also – perhaps above all – of our being. Only the unredeemed ego creates the destructive deceit that it stands alone and apart from – and in competition with – all others. The Lord Jesus taught us something different:

“Whenever you have done this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me.”

How? Why? Because he *is* those brothers and sisters, even – *especially* – those whom the world considers the very least of all. Our life is a pilgrimage, a journey from separation and division into the fullness of unity, of oneness, of an infinite whole, within which nothing can ever be lost or excluded. A great Indian teacher said:

“All differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything.”

This journey we are all on from the illusion of separation to the truth of oneness, is long and hard for most of us and takes us, probably, beyond this earthly life; and for this we need nourishment to give us strength. The theme of sustenance for the journey is an ancient one, found in all the scriptures of the world’s great faiths, including the Koran:

“When they had gone on further, Moses said to his attendant: ‘Bring us our morning meal, for we have suffered much on this long journey.’” (18: *The Cave*)

And in today's first reading, the Jews, journeying through the wilderness, complain to Moses that they have no food and were better off in Egypt – until God rains down bread on them from heaven. The same idea occurs in literature, too. Tolkien used it in the Elvish bread, *lembas*, which Galadriel gave to Frodo and Sam to sustain them on their journey into Mordor. Tolkien, ever the good Catholic, was inspired by the Eucharist in this. You can imagine his horror when the first American producers who were interested in filming *The Lord of the Rings* – long before Peter Jackson finally did – wanted to call it 'a food concentrate'. So much for the Eucharistic inspiration. But the idea remains: divine food, food provided from heaven for the journey.

For lovers of the Lord Jesus – including Tolkien – it will always be first and foremost the Eucharist that sustains us on our pilgrim way. In the gospel today, Jesus says that he is the bread come down from heaven, which gives eternal life – true food for the journey that we are all on, the journey back deep into the heart of the One from whom we came. There is no other direction for any of us to go in: we are going home, inexorably; we are returning to a land we never knew we came from; and, on the way, we have the 'bread from heaven' to feed us.