

Hugh Lavery – A Reflection

Much of the world's trouble, wrote Pascal, comes because people cannot stay quietly in their rooms. There is endless talk now of togetherness but much of it sounds like the nervy jargon of the desperate, of those who must have noise and chatter to counter the terrible assault of silence. Yet the good life does not begin with a party; that is its outcome. The good life begins within. A person's within is their real self, their only kingdom. And it is there, in silence, in solitude, in their still centre, that the personality is born and begins to bloom.

Loneliness is not absence of company. Indeed, loneliness can be felt most keenly in jovial company. Loneliness is simply the fear of being alone. This is the first fear an adult must overcome. For aloneness is not evil nor is it absence. It is a kind of cocoon in which a person learns to live with their self. Their real self. For there is another self, a kind of dust-cover, which we present to the world to win its commendation. It smiles, it boasts, it bewails. It asks for pity and it asks for approval. But it isn't me.

The real self is deep down and dwells in darkness. It is the great hinterland behind the promontory and does not catch the sun. It is a night place but it is not empty. It can remain fallow, can become infertile. For it needs tending and careful attention or it will grow wild and thorny and trouble our conscious self and threaten our façade. It refuses to die and always claims, indeed clamours, for recognition. Our unease, our fear of silence, that amorphous sense of guilt which darkens our days, are evidence that we are living falsely, on a front concealing a wasteland.

The true kingdom is within and behind and deep down. In each person there is this sanctuary, a hidden and holy place, and it is here that I am I. Yet we fear to enter and find our identity on this good ground. It seems too solemn, too secret and, above all, too silent. It is in silence that we become aware of the presence of God, not in the sky, in the vast infinite spaces, but in the seclusion of our own being. Jesus tells us the gate is narrow and that few dare to enter. Yet those who enter are not being destroyed but reborn. They find there the granite and the ground of their being and live no longer on the sands of human popularity or passing approval. They know stability and a joy that is not euphoria or any transitory emotion but a conviction that reality is good and that their own lives can be touched with glory.

Silence can be lead or gold. The person at odds within themselves finds aloneness a threat to their sanity. The person who has made the inward journey and entered their sanctum sees silence as precious, a conductor to that territory where alone the person finds coherence with themselves. Here there is no anger, no anxiety. In this interior tabernacle they perceive the presence of God and they know it is good to be here. Here they have room to be. To be themselves.