

# Reimagining Religion

An extract from *Reimagining Religion* by Jim Maher SJ (Messenger Publications 2023) highlights the link between Mass and life.



Sunday Mass and daily life are inextricably linked. The consecration affirms God's unwavering faith in us despite our betrayals which are not held against us. God's faith in us is ratified by the gift of his Son who endured an unjust death rather than give up on us. The consecration recapitulates the dynamics of death and resurrection in its different guises. There's the daily reality of betrayal, dehumanisation and alienation expressed through behaviours that are the opposite of life. Disturbing images fill our TV screens

on a daily basis, as we witness the sufferings inflicted on others by those whose connection with the human family has been severed and who live in their own dehumanised and alienated bubble. On the other hand, there's the possibility of forgiveness which culminates in transformation, both personal and collective, rolling away the heavy boulder that imprisons us in ourselves. The resurrection is at work in us when our unhealthy desires, fears, insecurities, angers and inflated egos are rolled away, allowing us to

be liberated from our false self. But we need help beyond ourselves to roll away the boulder, an idea captured by Ruth Fainlight in her poem 'The Angel' when she writes, 'Sometimes the boulder is rolled away, / but I cannot move it when / I want to. An angel must.' The 'angel' is divine or human outreach which makes it possible for the boulder to roll away. This reality is affirmed at the Eucharist. When Christian communities speak about 'salvation', they are referring to being saved from all that is personally and collectively destructive. God wants us to inhale the breath of life so that we are free to be who God wants us to be. But often we'd prefer to go our own way and destroy our identity as persons-in-relationship.

The resurrection can be compared to an unusually bright spring day when the sun suddenly appears bringing light and warmth interrupting the monotony of grey skies. That spring day is a sign of hope. It reminds us of what's to come and affirms that the meteorological conditions are already at work triggering the summer which will follow spring. The resurrection is already at work and partially fulfilled in this world as we await its fulfilment. When we're in the orbit of solidarity and compassion, it's like the spring day heralding the summer and goodness heralding the completion of resurrection.

At the conclusion of Mass, the congregation is reminded to 'Go now and enjoy yourselves / For that is what God made you to do / To go out there and enjoy yourselves.' There is a healthy heartiness about this instruction affirming the ordinariness and blessing of the material universe. This instruction echoes the sentiments of Ignatius of Loyola, who portrays God as wanting

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to share life and love with us for ever. Our loving response to God's friendship is expressed when we embrace life in all its fullness and goodness. There is a warm, rustic, down-to-earth glow to this Sunday gathering, where God is down-to-earth, and the congregation is having an 'as-it-is-in-heaven' experience. The sacredness of each person and the routine of daily life are highlighted. The hope coming from forgiveness is recalled. The light of resurrection dawns like a new day destroying the darkness of night and drawing us into the light. Earth is gathered up into the sphere of the divine, with all its mundane activities, joys and sorrows, sanctity and sinfulness, struggles and strife, as God comes down to earth where nothing or no one is beyond his healing embrace. The effect of such an experience on the speaker in the poem and their companion is 'Both of us smiling, radiant sinners.' The experience has been affirmative and hopeful encouraging our frail humanity. We need not be imprisoned because we are 'radiant sinners.' God's grace of transformation is radiated through the community experience, not suddenly and dramatically but gently and warmly. A community has been recharged by the grandeur of God. But we must be willing to embrace the gift and respond to it.