

Vignette

Janet Turpie-Johnstone

I HAVE TO SAY THAT FINDING MYSELF IN THE "PLACE" I am now, is to find myself in a strange land that twenty years ago was not even in my imagination. A life lived is just that, to summarise or make short of it is to miss the real events, the "wovenness", that is the lived. To speak of major moments is to miss all the ordinariness that is really my life. But ordinariness is such strange territory in this world of celebrities and the "five hundred top people of today". Ordinariness makes reading unpalatable, yet it is the thing that gives life and meaning, passion and compassion.

I am a salt water woman.

Growing up by the wild seas of our Southern Ocean. Deep green waters, that are both terrifying and beautiful, in one. Deep green waters that disappear over an unseeing horizon. Local yet universal. Familiar yet strange. Portland was and is my "home". A place of pain and of joy. On every return home, is to revisit all the pangs of childhood and adolescence. It is like a rehearsal for some play, going over the old so as to know the new. Experiencing it all again and again, feeling the sting of the salt of old wounds, weaving them into the fresh, making life vital and real in the now. How easy it is to just respond as habit teaches, I know this, I have been here before. Habit is part of the mix, but it is not the whole and each habit needs to be refreshed so as not to become the whole. Stale and hard, salted out of life, or fresh sprinkled lightly with some zest, is the offering I make. On looking back I look inwards, and find that the secret journey is the real one. The one from inside, the one from where I know I am alive, where I transform the habits into reality. Where I call to this world, "I am that I am". There is no need for any other explanation, I just know that I am. How Biblical, but how cheeky. There the familiar and the strange, coming together in the story of one woman's life.

I am a woman of religion.

Brought up Presbyterian, in country Victoria, I have ever so slowly made my way to becoming a Priest in the Anglican Church of Melbourne.

Here the old has become revitalised. From the passive to the active. When I reflect back I am surprised at this transformation. A child asking questions to an adult stimulating the asking of questions from other adults, trained not to question. This is religion. Although it comes in shapes and forms, doctrines and dogmas, knowings and unknowings. For me religion is about making connections with what is outside to what is inside each of us. We can rehearse and rehearse the taught stuff, but the making real is the inside becoming the outside. This is a lesson I learnt by returning home. As I sat with an Elder for long silences. Returning to becoming. The silence wove the inside out. Silence is the allowing of what is within to bloom and blossom. This is a particular silence. It is not the silence that has to speak of the distortions of life, it is the nurturing silence that brings forth what is deep and hidden, to blend with teaching and training, making whole and holy. This is my religion, and how for each to take responsibility to make each life whole and holy. The salt that stings and heals. The deep that is personal, yet universal. This is this woman.

The Reverend Janet Turpie-Johnstone is priest of the Anglican Parish of Djerrnong, Heathmont and Ringwood East.