

Thursday 24th March
2022

Meditation 23

Farewell to Daffodils



Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the even-song;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again. *Robert Herrick*
(1591-1674)

The glorious painting of golden daffodils by Berthe Morisot (1841-95-private collection) immediately catches our eyes. Yellow is the color most visible to our sight. People who have sight problems are grateful for the color yellow. Herrick's gentle poem is arresting, reminding us that our life is short and that we should not let time slip by. Every day is precious, including today.

Friday 25th March, 2022.

The Feast of the Annunciation

Meditation 23





In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The visit of the angel to Mary was the turning point in the history of salvation. God dispatched the celestial messenger to offer the young girl the opportunity of bearing His son. St. Luke captures Mary's puzzlement. Only in her early teens, Mary was still growing up and learning the mysteries of life. Without understanding clearly, she assented to the divine invitation. A seventh century Latin hymn plays on the words *Ave* (hail) and *Eve* (wife of Adam)

Receive the Ave from the mouth of Gabriel, we are wrapped in peace as it replaces that of Eve.

The beautiful predella, part of an altarpiece by Fra Angelico is preserved in the Prado Museum in Madrid. The scene is divided into two parts. In the center an angel appears to Mary, who is quietly reading in her room. In the background is a garden, seen only through a window. This device is a symbol of Mary's virginity. The angel delivers the divine message. When Mary consents to the invitation to become a mother, the Holy Spirit is shown descending in beams of gold. A bird peaches on the curtain rail. To the side, the first parents are expelled from the

garden of paradise for their disobedience to God. St. Paul says that death entered the world through sin, but now life is restored in Jesus.

The English poet, Denise Levertov (1923-97) was a convert to Catholicism. She migrated to the United States of America and taught at Stanford University and the University of Washington. Her conversion to Christianity had an impact on her poetry. Her poem, *Annunciation- Hail for the Space of an Uncontained God* (1989) captures the delicate moment when Mary receives her angelic visitor.



We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,
almost always a lectern, a book; always
the tall lily.

Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,
whom she acknowledges, a guest.

But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions
courage.

The engendering Spirit
did not enter her without consent.

God waited.

She was free

to accept or to refuse, choice
integral to humanness.

Aren't there annunciations
of one sort or another
in most lives?

Some unwillingly
undertake great destinies,
enact them in sullen pride,
uncomprehending.

More often
those moments
when roads of light and storm
open from darkness in a man or woman,
are turned away from
in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair
and with relief.

Ordinary lives continue.

God does not smite them.

But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.
She had been a child who played, ate, slept
like any other child – but unlike others,
wept only for pity, laughed
in joy not triumph.

Compassion and intelligence
fused in her, indivisible.

Called to a destiny more momentous
than any in all of Time,
she did not quail,
only asked
a simple, 'How can this be?'
and gravely, courteously,
took to heart the angel's reply,
perceiving instantly
the astounding ministry she was offered:
to bear in her womb
Infinite weight and lightness; to carry
in hidden, finite inwardness,
nine months of Eternity; to contain
in slender vase of being,
the sum of power –
in narrow flesh,
the sum of light.
Then bring to birth,
push out into air, a Man-child
needing, like any other,
milk and love –
but who was God.

This was the minute no one speaks of,
when she could still refuse.

A breath unbreathed,

Spirit,
suspended,
waiting.

She did not cry, "I cannot, I am not worthy,"
nor "I have not the strength."

She did not submit with gritted teeth,
raging, coerced.

Bravest of all humans,
consent illumined her.

The room filled with its light,
the lily glowed in it,
and the iridescent wings.

Consent,
courage unparalleled,
opened her utterly.

Saturday 26th March
2022

Meditation 25



THE DESIDERATA

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt
the universe is unfolding as it should.
Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you
conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors
and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life,
keep peace in your soul. With all its sham,
drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a
beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be
happy.”

Max Ehrmann (1872-1945) poem
painting by Vincent
Van Gogh (1853-1890) Wheatfield with
Cyprus, National Gallery London.

Sunday 27th March
2022

Meditation 26

Mothering Sunday



My gift to you is life.

The years will pass and I will watch you
grow.

Lines will cross my face, my eyes will grow
dim.

You will never change.

You will always be that child who looks
into my eyes.

My hair will silver and my hands will
grow less firm.

But know that they are always there to
catch you when you fall.

Anonymous

The title of the painting is *The Mother of Marin*, gives little away. We see an elderly woman seated in a chair. The artist, Helen Mabel Trevor (1830-1900) has caught her gaze. As she leans on his stick, her Rosary beads hang from the handle.

The woman looks with a warm smile. She is engaged with the artist, who captures her vivaciousness. We can imagine the artist and sitter chatting away, exchanging their views on the world. Perhaps the woman tells the artist about Marin, recounting some amusing tales. We do not know what was said, but the wonderfully warm expression on the mother's face indicate a pleasing conversation.

Oil on canvas (1892) in the Collection of the National Gallery of Ireland.