

Created + Called *a revolution of love and tenderness*

“Be who God created you to be and you will set the world on fire.” These words from St Catherine of Siena express a desire to be our deepest and truest selves in response to being known and loved by a God who, as Herbert McCabe OP says beautifully, is “helplessly and hopelessly in love with us”. God’s love changes us. It ignites the flame of desire in our hearts to be God’s love in the world. It ignites a revolution, a revolution fuelled by God’s love!

So, what might this revolution look like? When the prophet Micah was faced with the stirrings of revolution in the air because of the mistreatment of the lowly and oppression of the poor, God gave a clear message of what to do. “What does the Lord require of you? Do justice, love tenderness, and walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) Only this. These are perhaps unexpected qualities to associate with revolution.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), another unexpected figure is presented by Pope Francis. He encourages believers to look to Mary so we can “believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness” (EG, 288). In Mary, we see the qualities of humility, tenderness and concern for others are not virtues of the weak but of the strong. This is captured powerfully in Mary’s song of praise, the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55), where she has literally been ignited by the divine fire of God’s love. In response to living her true identity, Mary is created and called to ‘magnify’ the Lord with her whole being, and this ignites a transformation in others. Her prayer speaks of a revolution that “brings down the mighty from their thrones” and “raises the lowly”, through bringing forth the “loving tenderness of the heart of our God” (Lk 1:78) and the birth of a new world (EG, 288).

At times though, we might feel that we don’t really understand who God has created us to be, or it feels we are far from setting the world on fire. Artists like Michelangelo offer us consolation. He believed the sculptor was a tool of God, not creating but simply revealing the powerful figures already there. He once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set it free”. Let us trust that we are already created as God desires us to be. In fact, trust that, as St Catherine joyously declared, God is “pazzo d’amor” for us – literally, ‘crazy in love’ with us. Let us not be afraid to do something great with our lives and our love.

During the Nazi holocaust, the young 13-year-old Anne Frank wrote in her diary about the power of justice, tenderness and walking humbly with her God, saying: “The sharpest weapon of all is a kind and gentle spirit”. She also said: “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” Today, the *revolution of love and tenderness* starts with you and me.

As this year’s theme image invites us to enter a contemplative space through its deep colours, let us pray that we may all be living signs of the Father’s tenderness (Water From the Rock, 102) as we set the world on fire with God’s love.

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