

Forget your perfect offering – Fr Charlò Camilleri, O.Carm.

People are flawed, yet we are called to “ring the bells that still can ring”

Community

Religion

11 September 2022 | Fr Charlò Camilleri, O.Carm. | 0

3 min read

The Return of the Prodigal Son (Detail), by Rembrandt, c. 1669

24th Sunday in ordinary time - Today's readings: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; Psalm 51:3-19; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Luke 15:1-32.

In 1992, Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) released his ninth studio album entitled *The Future*, conveying through poetry and music his discomfort with the political and social turmoil marking the change of an era.

The Future was perhaps the most successful of his albums, and this has been even more so for [Anthem](#), the centrepiece of the collection, which continues to resonate with the deepest aspirations of the human heart. It took Cohen 10 years to write the lyrics, bringing together the sacred and the profane, religious imagery and undertones from Kabbalah mysticism, Christianity, Zen Buddhism and the Vedantas.

Although Cohen remained until his death a devout Jew, he was also for a number of years an ordained Rinza Buddhist monk, who was also deeply touched by Jesus “the most beautiful guy

LEONARD COHEN



THE FUTURE

Leonard Cohen's album *The Future* (1992)

who walked on the face of the earth”. Ultimately, Cohen confesses that upon investigating other spiritual traditions, he ended up enriched in the understanding of his Jewish faith.

It has been said that there is no religion Cohen didn't like, and perhaps he lived up to his original Jewish Biblical name Eliezer, meaning 'God is my helper'. In one of his interviews, given after the release of *The Future*, he reflected that we are called to inhabit and follow the invitation to walk into a biblical landscape, where we come to realise that it is, in actual fact, our own. In *Anthem*, he advises us to “ring the bells that still can ring” even if “they are few and far between” as he explains in an interview about the meaning of his celebrated lyrics.



Our world and experience of it is flawed. Unfortunately, this can throw us into resentment, cynicism and hopeless desperation. Cohen was labelled the 'Poet of Brokenness' as he confronts us with the fact that nothing is perfect: no society, no political and/or religious system, no person, not even ourselves. There's no such thing as a “perfect offering” if not a broken heart (Ps 51:17). Life and people are flawed – even those whom we adore – and these are going to hurt us deeply. Yet we are called (because we have an extraordinary capacity), to “ring the bells that still can ring”. This is perhaps a facet of the divine spark within us.

The Biblical readings for today's liturgy speak to us of God as the untiring one who “rings the bells that still can ring”. In the Book of Exodus, effaced by the depravity of the people who “have soon turned aside” from the way of righteousness and justice, God does not give in to wrath, opting instead to “ring the bell” of mercy.

In the gospel, Jesus is portrayed as someone who attracts and welcomes sinners, sitting at table with them. Again, in him, God “rings the bells” of understanding, concern for the lost sheep and a lost coin. God doesn't shy away from penetrating, with divine light, the cracks in all things, bringing all broken pieces together again, renovating the face of the earth and

each and every one of us, children of God. The merciful and compassionate father in today's gospel lavishes dignity on the younger son who was led astray, and simultaneously invites the elder son to “inhabit” – in Cohen's words – the joy of having found, saved and redeemed, the one who is lost.

In the second reading, the apostle Paul shares with us his experience of someone who was transformed by God's compassion, mercy, abundant patience and grace in Jesus Christ, making of him a credible witness of the Good News.

Only in comprehending this divine ringing of bells – described in Cohen's terms as an “inhuman generosity” overthrowing the world, were it to be embraced – that we realise there is no dispensation from our own responsibility to “ring the bells, that still can ring”.

charlo.camilleri@um.edu.mt

*Independent journalism costs money. Support Times of Malta for the **price of a coffee**.*

Support Us

Sponsored Articles