

1st July 2020

Stuff

“It is not he who has many possessions that you should call blessed: he more rightly deserves that name who knows how to use the gods’ gifts wisely and to endure harsh poverty, and who fears dishonour more than death.”

Horace, Odes, Book 4

My granny, as I’ve said before, was a regular user of the pithy phrase. Among them were, “There are nae pockets in a shroud”, and “You cam intae the warld wi’ nuthin’, an’ you’ll go oot wi’ nuthin’.” That was her way of saying, “Your possessions are yours to use for a wee while as you pass through this world. But they don’t belong to you. You only have them on loan. So, don’t get so hung up by what you have.”

Which was a puzzle really, because of the way my granny lived. She’d been brought up in poverty. Her early years of marriage were on farms as a dairy-maid, milking cows on “piece work” (the more cows you milked, the more you earned) while at the same time coping with a husband who spent his every last penny on drink. So, possessions mattered to my granny: the display-cabinet in the corner which was a gift from a doctor whose house she cleaned; the nick-knacks from holidays on her bedroom dresser and mantle-piece; and ... the drawer in her kitchen table which was *full* of “stuff”, all those things that she couldn’t bear to throw out.

Like most of us, my granny was caught between the “no pockets in a shroud” attitude and the reality of wanting to hold on to your “stuff”.

Of *course* we know we have nothing when we’re born and we can take nothing with us when we go. But it’s our approach to our stuff through our lives that’s the issue. Worth and value, the blessedness of life, as Horace reminds us, isn’t measured by possessions. It’s about attitude, how wisely we use the gifts we have been given.

Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Might it be that those who are poor, who can’t or don’t base their lives on possessions, are the most richly blessed?

A prayer for today

Living God, help me to honour life, and to use it well.

Help me to honour my gifts, and use them wisely.

Help me to know that my life can be stuffed full of blessedness. Amen

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