

26th December 2020

Flat

“Easy is the way down to the Underworld: by night and by day dark Hades’ door stands open; but to retrace one’s steps and to make a way out to the upper air, that’s the task, that is the labour.”

Virgil, Aeneid, book 6

There’s a story told of a family who were driving home when they realised the car’s steering wasn’t right. The driver pulled into a layby to check things out, only to discover that the nearside front tyre was almost completely flat. He was standing scratching his head when he was joined by his young son. Looking at the tyre, then looking at his anxious father, the child announced, sagely: “Never mind, dad. The tyre’s only flat at the bottom!” History doesn’t record what the reply was ...

Today is Boxing Day, the day after the day before. Whatever Christmas day has been for you, and whatever changes you’ll have made to your celebrations, traditions, numbers, food or timings this year, it will have been Christmas in one way or another, a day you’ve looked forward to and planned for over a number of weeks. But now that it’s over, I wonder how you might be feeling. Boxing Day can be a kind of let-down, when you feel a bit flat. It’s the same after any major event: a wedding; a concert; a presentation; a special meeting; a trip-of-a-lifetime. High one day, down the next. The aftermath of a big day brings its own flatness.

Let two voices respond to the flatness of Boxing Day. The first, from a child: “It’s only flat at the bottom.” Feeling down, dealing with flatness, scratching your head and wondering what to do, is natural. We’ve all been there. But it need only be flat for now, at the bottom, and not all the time. And the second, from Virgil of old. We *can* retrace our steps and find “a way out to the upper air”. Of course it’s a labour for us, even hard work. But we can’t stay where it’s flat when there are possibilities awaiting us.

I’m not saying Boxing Day is Virgil’s “Hades’ door”! Far from it. But it could be the beginning of something new and life-giving as we move upwards to the light once more. Now, “that *is* the task”!

A prayer for today

Today, loving God, I lean on your promise, that when you were with me at the top, you’d stay with me right to the bottom, and on the way up again. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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