

26th January 2021

Distress

“To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love, all pray in their distress.”

William Blake, Songs of Innocence ‘The Divine Image’

Before I leave Robert Burns for a while, I turn today to one of his lesser-known poems for my reflection.

Burns wasn't an orthodox religious thinker. Yet, in 1784, he wrote *Prayer Under the Pressure of Violent Anguish*, with this annotation: “There was a certain period in my life that my spirit was broke [*sic*] by repeated losses and disasters, which threatened, and indeed effected, the utter ruin of my fortune. My body too was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a Hypochondria, or confirmed Melancholy: in this wretched state, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder, I hung my harp on the Willow tree, except in some lucid intervals, in which I composed the following.”

*O THOU Great Being! what Thou art,
Surpasses me to know;
Yet sure I am, that known to Thee
Are all Thy works below.*

*Thy creature here before Thee stands,
All wretched and distress;
Yet sure those ills that wring my soul
Obey Thy high behest.*

*Sure, Thou, Almighty, canst not act
From cruelty or wrath!
O, free my weary eyes from tears,
Or close them fast in death!*

*But, if I must afflicted be,
To suit some wise design,
Then man my soul with firm resolves,
To bear and not repine!*

When people are in distress, as William Blake knew, they'll pray to anything – mercy, pity, peace, love, or whatever God they name. That was my hospice experience. But don't criticise them, for I believe God is saying to them, and to Robert Burns, “Thank you! I'm glad to have you back.”

A prayer for today

Lord, in my distress, I pray.

If others are in distress, bless them as I am sure you bless me. Amen