

10th November 2023

Something

**"Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire
whether or not they are worthy."**

Thomas Merton, *from a letter to Dorothy Day*

The Internationale is a left-wing anthem written by anarchist, Eugène Pottier, in the latter part of the 19th century. It is a stirring call, indeed: "Arise, ye workers from your slumber; arise, ye prisoners of want" (given by the contemporary singer-songwriter, Billy Bragg, as "Stand up, all victims of oppression, for the tyrants fear your might.") As it rallies working men and women to the international ideal that "unites the human race", it's not surprising it's been a standard of the socialist movement ever since.

I've never sung *The Internationale*, and I'm not sure I would recognise it anyway. But, given my reflection yesterday on "nothingness", I was intrigued to find this line in the anthem's lyrics:

We are nothing. Let us be all.

This seems to me to be an unfortunate turn of phrase, for it has the connotation of acquiescing to the down-trodden nature of the life the workers are being encouraged to rise against. "We are treated as nothing, so we are nothing, and we want to be more than that." I get the second part, but I am uncomfortable with the first. Why *would* we agree that "we are nothing" because people say we are, or society deems us to be? Would it not be better to say, "We are *something*, and let us be proud of that"; or "We are *not* nothing, but we want to be more than we are."?

Too often, and too painfully, I've spent time with people in their last days who were wrestling with their worth and value and coming up short. They had been treated as nothing. They believed they were nothing. And – if there was a God and if there was a reckoning – they believed that God would count them as nothing too, and they would be cast aside.

We are *something*. We can be more, of course, and use that "something" better. But we are never "nothing". That's not God's way, so why should it be ours? If *The Internationale* is to be worth anything, it is surely to see worth in every individual, and to have every individual believe they have value. As Thomas Merton says, it should be our job to love people as they are, without stopping to ask whether they're worth it.

A prayer for today

Lord, if I am something to you, let that something matter to me too. Amen