

Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

Last week I cited Nina Mac Laughlin a writer/carpenter and her winter 2020 column in the quarterly journal of writing and writers, *The Paris Review*. That column series is called, *Winter Solstice*, referring to the date when we have the shortest day, longest night in the calendar year which occurs on December 21, 2020.

That column got me to her Summer Solstice columns in the summer of 2019, in the same journal.

I think that she is one of the finest writers that I have ever come across, she has to be phenomenally widely read, and she has an incredible depth as demonstrated in her ability to quote and connect such disparate sources over hundreds of years and multiple cultures.

I offer just a brief bit of her column from June 21, 2019, as found in *The Paris Review*. It gives us in this season of loss much to ponder as to the mechanics of loss in the context of the human experience and, in my mind, a healthy, flexible, and intelligent Catholic Tradition, a Tradition that is living not dead and locked in vaults of an ancient and forgotten past.

These Advent posts yesterday and today come late in the day because I have had funerals for grandfathers, two grandfathers, mourned by children and grandchildren. Both funerals included eulogies or Words of Remembrance that were awesome, loving, and sensitive reflections on the lives and love of real, obviously wonderful persons.

I believe that both of these grandfathers, as is the case with all of us, I hope, were seen as instruments of making it “on earth as it is in heaven” and even though it is almost impossible to see the faces of the grandchildren to know their grief, without words but in the totality of their lives, these grandfathers introduced their families to eternal life, life that did not begin at their deaths, but was always, always the reality.

I do not know how it works I believe it. I hope you find the following from Nina Mac Laughlin worth your time:

“New season. New you. We began in the sky, in the stardust, we moved wombward into the water, out into the earthly world, and we arrive, now, in fire. Happy first day of summer.

The solstice is a special day, irregular, when doors swing open that are otherwise closed, like on Halloween, like the winter solstice and the equinoxes. There are extra layers of possibility afoot. Open yourself, why not, ease yourself toward a more primal state of mind.

A battle’s taking place. Twins wage war for rulership over the year.

According to the ancient myths, the Oak King has been in power since the solstice in December. Now, after half a year at the helm, he’s sapped. Today, the summer solstice, when the sun reaches its highest point in the sky here in the northern hemisphere, the Holly King, the dark mischievous other half, beats his brother, and takes the throne for the darkening part of the year. He’ll rule through yule.

The wheel of the year goes round—round like wreaths hung on doors in winter, round like flower crowns. Two halves within the whole, each force in tension with the other, pushing against, pulling apart, each wanting to overpower its irreconcilable twin. “The very value attached to the life of the man-god necessitates his violent death as the only means of preserving it from the inevitable decay of age,” writes James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. “The same reasoning would apply to the King of the Wood; he, too, had to be killed in order that the divine spirit, incarnate in him, might be transferred in its integrity to his successor.” Ritual death, a fertility fest, rebirth.

Power rising, taking hold, falling, taking new form. “He must increase, but I must decrease,” says John the Baptist of Jesus, born six months, a year’s half-turn, before him. “You can never have a new thing without breaking an old,” says D.H. Lawrence. “The new thing is the death of the old.” What’s coming?

We’re caught between duality: heaven and hell, summer and winter, light and dark, ant and grasshopper, holly and oak, superego and id, and—the big one—life and death, the circle whose warm-cool palms cup us all. What’s here, where we’re standing, in the center? In plants and trees there is what’s called the meristem, collections of undifferentiated cells which maintain the capacity to proliferate throughout the entire lifespan of the plant. They’re why trees

keep growing, thicker and taller, through the years. Meristem. Merry stem. It might as well be another name for the maypole, the grand erection of the trunk, its penetration up and into the sky, ribboned approximation of the earth's axis. Meristem, this cellular force, this botanical meat or marrow, this pure child that exists in our full-fledged adulthood, obscured by layers of growth and knowing. As potter M.C. Richards writes in her book *Centering*, "Even at the top of the oldest oak there is the meristem, out which new leaves push. Child in man." It doesn't go away."

Peace be with you!!!!!!