

Michael Leunig, God, and the Common Cold

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The last time I wrote I suggested that the changing of the seasons reminds us of the changes in our lives and in our spirituality at different times and stages of life. In particular I looked at the season of winter. This time I thought I might look at one the scourges of this time of year.

About 15 years ago Michael Leunig had a couple of books published that were insightful reflections on the everyday common experiences of life. These books were called “The Prayer Tree” and “The Common Prayer”. They were not formal prayers or in any way traditionally religious and not ostensibly Christian. They were simple prayers written in a pithy way that brought you up with start and made you think about aspects of your life in a different way than you would normally think about them. There were prayers about rain, birds, hair, the seasons and many other aspects of life. But one changed the way I thought about getting a cold. While this prayer does not negate the fact that getting a cold is a nuisance, it does remind us that sometimes we forget to slow down and perhaps we need reminding every now and then that we need to take stock and become aware of our fragile nature. His prayer goes like this:

God bless those who suffer from the common cold.

Nature has entered into them;

Has led them aside and gently laid them low

To contemplate life from the wayside;

To consider human frailty;

To receive the deep and dreamy messages of fever.

We give thanks for the insights of this humble perspective.

We give thanks for blessing in disguise.

Amen

Leunig points us to the awareness that God can be experienced in all things; the unexpected places and moments are all pregnant possibilities for being awakened to the grace of God. So often we look for God in the good things of life, and this is where we most easily find and experience the mystery of God. However, Leunig is reminding us that the Ultimate Mystery and Reality is to be found in all that is. In our frailty, our pain, our dreams, our humility, our illness, the Mystery of Life is revealed. This is not to say that God wills these things on us or on others – this is a very human failing and projection – but rather everything is full of potential for knowing the presence of God. This is an uneasy reminder, but next time we have a cold, despite all of its nuisance value, we might have a look at Leunig’s view of the world – we might appreciate the gift of the cold and see what is being revealed to us about ourselves, the world and Ultimate Reality.