

A painting of a coastal scene. In the foreground, a monk in a white robe stands on a grassy bank, looking out at the sea. A brown cow stands beside him. The sea is a vibrant blue, with white foam from waves crashing against a rocky shore. The sky is a soft, hazy blue. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The Cow & The Monk

- Strolling by the Cliffs of Moher

Imagine a place where you can forget about practically everything or everyone! Where would that place be?

To some, allusions to nature especially the sea often provide a positive backdrop for daydreaming and the desire of escaping our modern and hectic lives. The crisis during and post lockdown may still have impact on many of us in one way or another. Perhaps, we have and still experience moments of fear, frustration, sacrifice, compromise, oppression, temptation, hurt, or even loss and grief. Looking back on our journey, we may recognize joys, struggles or even both. In the process, we may also tend to be oblivious of the Divine's grace that has held us together and led us on particularly during such difficult time of emptiness and turmoil.

And so, with the tornado's swirl of confusion and uncertainty, the scene ahead becomes blurry or perhaps lost in a distant fog. Memories of doubts and despair make it harder to find the delight on our path. Having said that, we can all overcome those unpleasant thoughts and feelings by simply letting out whatever comes to mind on paper, walls or simply wood or glass, be it words, images or both. So, whether you scribble, doodle or simply splash paint aimlessly, that is sufficient in giving inspiration and sustenance to your soul and spirit.

Fixed to a wall in the downstairs hall, a vacant window occupied a considerable large space at the De Mazenod House Retreat and Spirituality Centre in London. This window served no purpose as such apart from separating the office from the main hall. Somehow, there was a similarity between that window and those vacant places in life, where we often want them to be alive and filled with colours.

To some extent, I felt compelled to do something on that empty glass; "Perhaps covering it with a piece of fabric" I said. "Or simply filling it with an abstract painting" I wondered.

Though, after some time of pondering, the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare came forth as a suitable candidate for this work. I fell in love with this magnificent scenery and its tranquillity, especially when not inundated with tourists of course. Visually, or at least for me, the cliffs and the ocean combine an extreme deep focus, where we feel one with our surroundings. More importantly, the aim was not to depict a realistic painting as such but rather to interweave a story, with which we can all connect in some way or another. So, I embarked on a journey of exploring and discovering ways of weaving a harmonious fabric that speaks to the viewer's heart and mind at once. First, I started off with oil paint but as the work progressed, I resorted to using stones, glass, sea shells, fabric and wood to capture a place that awakens not only our visual but also tangible senses.

As arresting as the rich imagery of water is, many secrets are held in the depth of water so in the hearts of others and their personal/cultural richness. Each one of us has a wordless place where we hold waves of insight, wisdom and unconditional love, which provide the training ground for charity to grow. With this in mind, gratitude, at its heart, is a non-tangible term that often sound foreign to many in our modern societies, especially when encountering challenges and changes. Here, Pope Francis reminds us that gratitude is a flower that blooms in noble souls. Sometimes, this soul-space is met in times of discernment, as we listen to our heart and try to unearth the choice that is right.

Over the course of the painting, a monk and his cow emerged strolling alongside the lush green grassy path overlooking the cliffs. The monk rested his glass made shoe firmly on the ground, while still holding onto his wooden staff. He then took a deep breath inhaling the fresh salt-filled sea air and told the cow:

“Isn’t this place incredibly magical?”

The cow lifted her head up having just had a delicious herby snack and said:

“My dear monk, the earth is our common home and we are all connected”.

Just as the monk cares for the cow, she is also, I suppose, providing the milk and butter for the community as well as the fertiliser. The cow knows this place very well and she knows the monk too - There is a harmony between them. Also, the sheer beauty of the scene they are looking upon and drawing us into call me to realise God’s power and magnificence.

On some level, his journey must have also been arduous and lengthy, and perhaps marked by times of no thoughts, feelings, insights or inspirations. In a way, his solitary walk of mystery, although accompanied by his cow, resembles our journey and solitary walks in many ways. Despite this, many of us often feel that we are also companioned even when we feel alone.

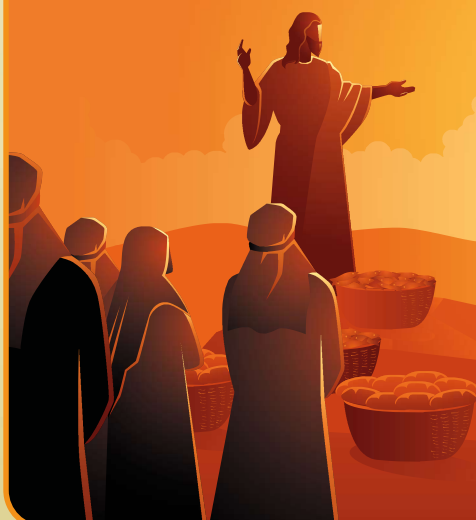
As you know, in our prayer, there comes the reminder that we have not been abandoned in this place to wander alone; we are always loved and never alone.

Needless to say, when painting or looking at a picture, we usually associate the image with a story, an encounter or an experience. This maybe positive or negative and we often see ourselves in the heart of the picture. On the surface, this maybe another idyllic scene but as we take a close look and reflect on the imagery of the cliffs, we realise that, they too, have withstood the elements for so long and yet look as majestic as ever be. Hence, when embracing the steadfastness of those cliffs, fires of excitement are awakened, an energy full of hopes and visions with focused determination and commitment. All in all, the moral heart of this painting is, as we tune in to the voice of silence not only over the Cliffs of Moher, but also within us, we get to hear the voice of the Divine too.

– Chaher Rhomaei



Sunday Reflections



Each week a reflection on the Sunday Readings is published on our website oblates.ie For over five years Br Michael’s weekly reflection has enriched, challenged and comforted so many people around the world. Fr Brian Maher has recently taken over the preparation of these reflections from Br Michael Moore. Fr Brian writes: “A Gospel reflection is no more than one person’s response to the Gospel. We can each respond in our own way and from our own situation.”

If you like to receive the reflection please sign up online or email: communications@oblates.ie