

## BEING OUR TRUE SELVES: 12<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY C

Recently a friend sent me a *YouTube* interview. Karen Dande was discussing with Anita Moorjani her recent book *Dying to Be Me*, which for weeks on end was on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and has already been translated into twenty-eight languages. Anita describes her experience of what is called '*life after life*'.

Anita was terminally ill with stage 4 lymphoma cancer with seemingly no chance of recovery. There were large tumours all over her body. She could not walk, her organs were shutting down, and she was drifting into a coma in which she found herself hanging between life and death. She was more outside her body than in it. She was aware of her 'essence' or consciousness or soul being outside her body. Yet she was hearing everything around her and more, and was conscious of her husband and mother crying around her bed. Anita estimates that her coma lasted for thirty hours, after which she found herself gradually coming back to her body. But to her complete amazement, she found herself moving towards complete healing. Within four days the terminal cancer was reduced by 70%, and eight and a half years down the track Anita is today totally free of cancer.

I'm very challenged by all that. But so much for now of those extraordinary physical changes! What was happening to her mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? She claims that she became vulnerable to cancer because throughout her whole life up till then, her mind and emotions had been out of sync. with her body. She had lived her life with tremendous fear - fear of being herself with others, fear of being her true self, and fear of expressing her real self to others. '*I had always been a people pleaser,*' she said, '*I had always done what other people wanted me to do. I was always afraid of not meeting their expectations. Everything I did I did because I wanted to be liked. I'd led my whole life like that. I had suppressed who I am. I had completely lost my identity.*'

With this new knowledge about herself and with her body healing so rapidly, Anita decided she must come back to her body and start living the rest of her life completely true to her real identity, true to her real inner self, and true to the husband she dearly loved. Since then she has kept sharing the wisdom of her experience with snippets like these: '*Life is a gift. Live it fully. Love yourself and you'll love everybody else. But if you don't love yourself you are miserable, and you'll start sharing your misery with everyone around you.*'

What is particularly striking about Jesus, as we gather from the gospel today is how true he was to his sense of his own identity. But what did other people think of him? He wanted to know. What did his close friends, his apostles, think of him? What did he think of himself? So many people had got him wrong, even to the extent that they were making wild and absurd claims that he was John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other dead prophet come back to life. But Peter, speaking for the others in the group, got him just right. '*You,*' he said, '*are the Christ of God.*' Yes, Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Saviour, the one whom God has sent to save us all, from everything evil, harmful, hurtful and sinful.

Jesus knows that Peter and his other missionaries have got him right. But aware of his full identity and being true to his complete sense of his mission, Jesus spells out what kind of messiah he is meant to be. He will not be an armed warrior, striking enemies down left, right, and centre. He will not be a victorious king, lapping up honours and surrounded by cheering supporters. No, his mission and the price he must pay for being himself leads Jesus to say without fear or favour: *'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death...'* In other words, Jesus is saying: *'I am the Messiah all right, but a suffering Messiah, one destined to die in order to be true to my identity and mission.'*

Some time ago the popular ABC presenter, Caroline Jones, published her autobiography. She called it *'An Authentic Life'*. Caroline Jones, Anita Moorjani, and Jesus of Nazareth, have this in common. They have discovered for themselves the wisdom of that ancient saying: *'To your own self be true.'*

What about us? What about you and me? Are we who we really are or only who we pretend to be? Are we who we want to be? Most of all, are we really and truly followers of Jesus - the Son of God, and the most genuine human being there has ever been? Are we?

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