

The Night Train To Lisbon

I have been reading a novel by Pascal Mercier; “Night Train to Lisbon”. It is a fascinating and indeed engaging novel about a classics professor who, following an encounter with young woman and then an encounter with a book in a second-hand book store, simply walks out of his classics class and catches the Night Train, from Geneva to Lisbon. It is the book he has brought that drives him; a diary of the thoughts of an enigmatic Portuguese Aristocrat, writing in the time of the Salazar dictatorship. In these diary notes come philosophical musings that prompt memories of Marcus Aurelius. It is the Portuguese Aristocrat he wants to know more about.

This book became a personal encounter with my past. I am not a Latin Scholar, but I do have a great love for the Classics and they have had a huge impact on my life. I recall for instance, as a nineteen-year old buying a copy of ‘Dante’s Divine Comedy’ in a second-hand book-shop (long gone) on Mulgrave Street in Wellington. It’s thinking. It’s portrayal of life’s journey impacted me both, personally, and as a person of Faith.

Now fifty six years later I am on a train, heading from Waikanae to Wellington. In fact I am on a time machine, totally lost in thought and memories. Coming into Porirua, I remember what it was like Fifty-five years ago. So much harbour has now been reclaimed. The train station was just being built when I first saw this place. Access between the Town and Porirua East was via a bridge just north of the town.

I found myself immersed in the event that brought me to Porirua. I had dreams. I had hopes, but no real hint of the tragedy that lay ahead. And then... the noise of the train and another stop. Eventually the tunnels from which one bursts out into the panoramic vista of Wellington that I came to love. The words of Amadeu de Prado echo in my mind..... “*given that we can live only a small part of what there is in us - what happens to the rest?*” Have I lived my life in the fullest possible sense?

Unlike T S Eliot, I wasn’t seeing it for the first time, (*Little Gidding*) but I was definitely reviewing my life. By the Grace of God, Tragedy has been overcome by a new gift of life. These encounters, (*Pascal Mercier’s book and my train ride to Wellington*) Primal in a way, but both, profound affirmation. The wonder of God’s gift of life is for fully grasping and celebrating. So often, tragedy is the birthplace of new hope and life.

Soli Deo Gloria