

Can I Play For You



Last night Santa Claus brought me a drum! I'm not very good at it yet, because I'm only five, but I do love it. This morning the priest told us, during mass, that the Baby Jesus had just been born in a stable in a place called Bethlehem. I don't know where that is but it must be in some part of Cork city. The priest said that Jesus was very poor and couldn't afford to be born in a hospital - like I was - but that he was also a king - of all the world. The priest said we should visit the Baby Jesus and bring him some gifts. I asked my great-grandmother about that and she told me she knew exactly where the Baby Jesus was and promised to take me to visit him.

We found him, and his mother Mary and Joseph and some animals, in the life-sized crèche at Saints Peter and Paul's church in the center of Cork city. My great-grandmother exchanged some pleasantries with Joseph and cooed at the baby, but her main interest was in Mary. In fact she spoke at length every day with Mary about mother stuff and great-grandmother stuff.

While she was busy I decided to play my drum for Baby Jesus. I still wasn't very good at it, but I gave it my best shot. He began to smile toothlessly and to gurgle. I'm not very good either at understanding gurgle but I took it to mean that he approved of my gift.

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Years later, during mass, I found a portal and entered a time warp, travelling into the past at a dizzying speed. I found myself in a middle-Eastern city. I heard the sound of drummers, but this was chilling, fear-instilling military drumming. A crowd was approaching, following a band of soldiers who were vindictively prodding a criminal forward with their spears. He didn't look like the criminal type, but you never know. Swept along by the mob, I decided to take a closer look. Holy God! I recognized the same eyes I had seen in Saints Peter and Paul's church, so many years ago at the other side of the portal. I was dumbfounded. When I came to my senses, I followed the noise and found that he had been crucified; skewered grotesquely on a jibbet. Then I saw his mother. I recognized her immediately. There was no sign of Joseph - perhaps he had died already.

I stood a little way from the crowd, and softly began to play my drum. In Ireland we are taught three kinds of music - Goltraí (music to make people weep with nostalgia for home), Geantraí (music to make people happy or to make them laugh) and Suantraí (lullabies to soothe pain and induce restful sleep.) I began to play my own favorite Suantraí music, and as I did, his mother turned around and we looked soulfully at each other. She nodded gratefully. Then he looked at me and in spite of the searing pain and the fear of being abandoned by his father, the light in his great heart shone. It's hard to imagine a crucified man smiling; but he did.

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Since then many, many years have passed and now I am an old man, getting ready to die. I am sitting in a chair, out of doors, in the warm sunlight, wrapped in a comforting blanket. A grandniece of mine has been lovingly looking after me these last few weeks, but just now she is indoors attending to some chores. And that was when he chose for us to meet the third time. By now I would have recognized him anywhere. He looked younger than when I had seen him last and his very being glowed with a transpersonal light. I bade him sit down; which he did. Whenever my grandniece reappeared, I intended to ask her to bring him a cup of tea and a piece of plum pudding - it's just a few days after Christmas.

On a whim, I decided to play my drum for him. With old, gnarled fingers I began to beat out some Geantraí - I wanted to see him laugh. But soon my old fingers got tired and the sticks fell to the ground. He bent down and picked them up; then he asked, "May I?" I nodded and he took the drum from my lap. I have never heard anybody play like he did. Honoring my mood, he began with Geantraí, but subtly and over time, it morphed into Goltraí, evoking such longing for home that tears rolled down my cheeks. Finally, he moved seamlessly into Suantraí. I closed my eyes and suddenly 10,000 stars went supernova, exploding inside my skull and releasing unimaginable light! All boundaries dissolved and the ego faded like a morning mist under the loving attention of the Sun.

I wonder who will wake up?

Namasté,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Seán". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the text "Namasté,".

Tír na nÓg

December 2013