

*He said, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how . . . Mark 4: 26-29*

A week ago my family and friends joined me to celebrate my 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. And strange things happened. One of our guests broke into the conversation and raised a question addressed to me: *What was the most significant, eventful person in your life?*

Now just prior to that my guest Larry Murphy had been talking about someone he knew whose first name was Theophane. And before I had time to think I said: *How odd! When I at age 15 had contacted a seminary in New York to express my desire to enter, the religious order sent its vocation director all the way down to Philadelphia to meet with me and my father.* In those days (1943) he came - collar and all - by train and then by trolley to my neighborhood. My father was reduced to silence by the presence of a priest in our living room. To make it short, I was accepted and thereafter spent the next twenty-three years of my life in the ambience of Franciscan spirituality.

But in the light of my party guest's question regarding the most significant person in my life, the name Theophane - raised suddenly out of nowhere by guest Larry Murphy - caused me to spout out (spontaneously) the name of that priest of old: Theophane (whose surname happened *also* to have been Murphy). I mean you could bet a million dollars that a name like Theophane would never emerge at a luncheon in The Girl and the Fig in 2023 AD – and yet it fell from Larry's lips and I did a double take! It seemed that Larry – unbeknownst to him – had carried me back not just to my first contact with that strange name of so many years ago – but also to the deeper meaning of that word Theophane . . . which my son evoked when he asked *What does the name mean – its etymology?* And I said: *It's like the word epiphany or the word theophany, meaning: an appearance of God – like you know old Moses startled by that vision of a burning bush that talks, that changed his life.*

And so this month, so many years later on my birthday a distant word, a name, came to the surface again that had been always present, never merely past, telling me a seed was sown back then, a name that God confirmed as a birthday present to me even now – a moment of divine presence, a theophany - like any parable that can change our lives if we could remain sensitive to such moments as seeds sown by Christ to make us grow.

And that's not all. For the guest who initiated this dynamic into our party then asked me: *What was the most artistic event that changed your life?* And immediately there came to mind myself as a sophomore in a high school music appreciation class that was all turmoil due to fidgety students and an exasperated teacher – when suddenly someone played that theme from Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. It struck me like the sound of silence. It resonates within me even now. And thanks to our guest's introducing his question, I now understand that event of old to have said to me that our lives are - and are *meant to be* - unfinished symphonies. Perpetual. Think about it. You are meant to be music.

**Geoff Wood**