

A bit of drama

by A. Soule

It's fair to say that most people like a bit of drama, and by and large the shows we like are those which grip us. Quite often the story grows in our mind and we come away wondering whether that's how the characters should or should not have behaved, or perhaps how would we have handled things.

Some TV dramas, for whatever reason, seem to catch people's curiosity and end up generating high viewing figures. This is how it turned out to be for the recently aired BBC drama 'Normal People' based on a novel written by Sally Rooney. Both the novel and the drama have had good reviews generally but also a fair share of criticism for the needless vulgarity shown.

The title of book and the TV drama 'Normal People' is curiously interesting; implying that this is how most ordinary people lead their lives and react to situations. The storyline is fairly common - Connell and Marianne who have known each other since their school years fall in love, break up, meet up later and part again. Both of them are at an age where they don't really understand the depth of feeling they have for each other. As the story progresses, the veneer of defiant choices in life slowly peel off to reveal a deep emotional vulnerability in both.

Although the novel is set in Ireland, there is nothing explicitly Christian (in the devotional sense) about the story, and some scenes may indeed seem gratuitous and unnecessary. And yet the story in the main is quite poignant - two people going through life, reacting not as saints but as 'normal people'. It shouldn't take a great leap of imagination to ask if this is how normal people live their lives, who then are those who choose not to live in such a way? Would it exclude people who don't subscribe to making casual choices in life or those who take life a bit more seriously? However that may be, there is also the fact that art reflects life, and what we see there is in some ways a reflection of what the world seems to be from a certain point of view.

What is plainly evident is the fact of a generational shift; the pattern of life which society expected some years ago has changed. There has always been an awareness that religious belief has mostly existed within the margins of people's lives, and now those margins have moved even further - to the point that people seem to be embarrassed to talk about their faith. It is also true that people on the outside often feel 'good Christians' are simply too embarrassed to acknowledge the messy circumstances of people in the real world. The drama does reveal the sad underbelly of modern life which, if you like, you could either condemn or take that as a step in understanding what life really is like for those starting out in the 21st century.

It has to be said that most people by and large lead decent lives but when it comes to faith, the usual tendency is to shy away from an overtly religious approach, often labelling Christianity as being outdated and not being in synch with their complicated lives. Whilst it's worth reflecting on this, it is also true that people were leading complicated and burdened lives when Jesus preached. What Jesus taught has survived many centuries; ideas and fashions have come and gone but the message of faith and the teachings live on. These teachings are aimed at the very essence of our being - parts of ourselves which even we don't understand.

Coming back to 'Normal People', what may have resonated with people who liked this drama is that it showed how emotionally fragile we all are. Something said or unsaid can so easily change the course of our lives. It is beyond doubt a moving story - but it is just that - a story, and this is how it was crafted by its author - Sally Rooney.

Real life, whether we like it or not, has many more dimensions to it - and some drama too. No one knows where our own stories lead to - apart of course from the Author of our lives. One thing we do know is that nothing can separate us from the love of God and through all the good and bad times we go through, the Good Shepherd walks with us.