



Cathedral

*Be whole in each thing.
Put all you are in the smallest thing you do.*

Ricardo Reis

The biscuits sigh happily in the oven. The jam bubbles on the fire and its steam frizzles my hair. I peek at the pastry that insists on not growing, as if it were trying my patience and hope. On the kitchen countertop, the recipe book whispers its secrets.

I feel the pulse of the city. I feel its pain, its mismatches, its impatient love. I live it every day. An ordinary life that I try to put white cuffs on. Although suffering is not a flower, it needs to be handled just as gently.

My grandfather died on the eve of Christmas Day. Whenever I think of him, I always remember a story he used to tell us. When the Convent of Mafra in Portugal was being built, King João V liked to inspect the works. He would go near the masons and ask them questions about what they were doing.

Some told him they were breaking stone, others said they were polishing wood. One day, the king put the same question to a man who was making lime. The man, whose work was quite insignificant compared to that of the other craftsmen, replied that he was building a cathedral.

I have never forgotten this story, which teaches us that life's meaning comes from it being part of a whole. And since that day, I have been trying to build my cathedral.

Our small human history is full of moments when we rise above things, of moments when we are whole. To be whole is not to be perfect. To be whole is to be present, to believe that there are always new and joyful ways of starting the same life over again. It's the ability to look closer at those who are close to us.

This is the kind of hope that Christmas brings to us. Each day presents us with a new opportunity to be better at what we do, and to give more of ourselves. Each day may bring to us small redemptive gestures, or the simple understanding that we already have what we need. We all have a cathedral to build. And Christmas, which can actually be lived on every other day of the year, teaches us that.

Whatever you make of your Christmas, make it whole.