

Issue 12 | 30 March 2024

# inspire

YOUNG CATHOLICS'  
QUARTERLY



FROM THE  
MAKERS OF  
THE  
TABLET

**Believe  
with  
the  
heart**

**Rereading Christus Vivit • Witnessing synodality  
Guides to life • Fantasists and epicures**

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## Welcome to inspire

POPE FRANCIS' latest account of his long life – laconically titled *Life* – tells the story through history, matching 14 biographical scenes to world events in his lifetime. It's a conceit that emphasises his longevity: most strikingly, no future pontiff will share his memory of the outbreak of the Second World War.

Much as he opposes the idea of a "museum" Church, the Pope himself is a fascinating repository of influences and ideas from another age. Popes are usually old, having got that way by living life, their character more tangible for being imprinted with their experiences. To complain (or sneer) that the successor to St Peter is invariably a pensioner is to miss the real problem with the Church's gerontocracy. It's not that younger people don't have a senior role – it's that the junior roles are often no role at all.

While this has something to do with the catch-all peril of clericalism, self-consciously with-it assertions about young Catholics (that we're all desperately

conservative, that we're all desperately alienated by the Church's conservatism) betray the same neglect. These "young Catholics" are treated as evidence for an argument, not people with a place.

Too many occasions for participation have been desiccated of meaning and agency. As Wyatt Olivas writes in this edition of *Inspire*, the persistent challenge for many enthusiastic people growing up in the Church is being told "no" – by people who presumably are eager to see the young at Mass but have narrow ideas about what they should do in other areas.

There's no shortage of stuff to do. The sacraments, schooling, the discernment of vocations – which Emmanuel Donkor explores in our cover story – are built around the young, while people like the Salesians and Jesuits make them their special concern. But they are too often treated as a special annexe, when they are as fully a part of the Church as the Pope. We can recognise the seniority of his place without accepting any inferiority for ours.



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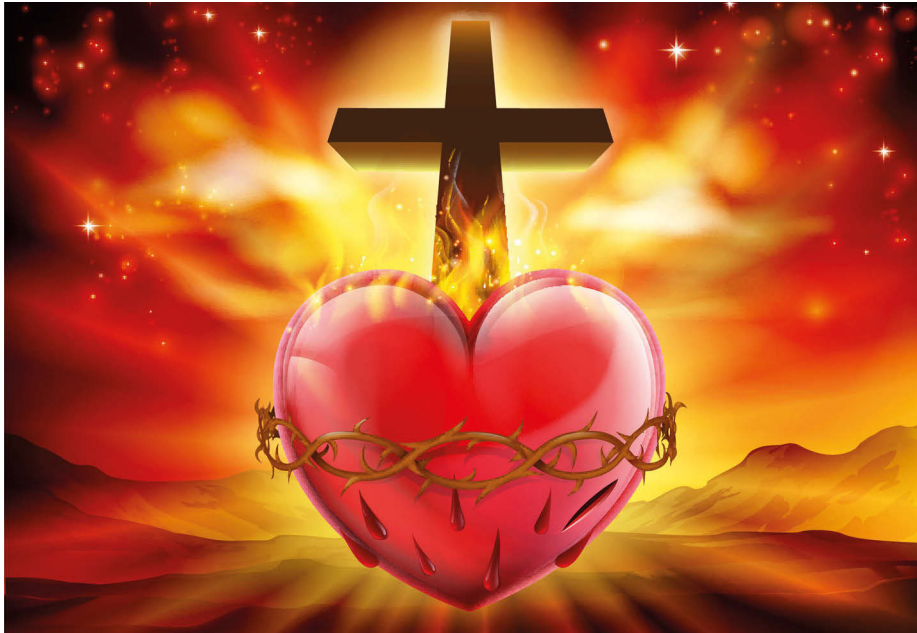
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## Believe with the heart

The first step to recognising God’s personal call to us is to respond to our universal vocation to love God and neighbour. By Emmanuel Donkor

In their heart of hearts, men and women love a call to adventure. We can all think of people throughout history who have embarked on adventurous journeys and lives.

Yet Europe and North America are facing sharp falls in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Young people shy away from this adventurous call to be close collaborators with Christ, faced with the challenge of living the faith in a secularised milieu and, perhaps most difficult of all, committing to celibacy.

Can we blame them? This culture treats faith as little more than fantasy. I once told a group of seminarians from my parish in Ghana about my pastoral missionary experience in the UK. I said that any young person who decides to become a priest or religious in Europe is as courageous as the early martyrs who saw death but still embraced it for the love of God and neighbour.

Christopher Kaczor of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles has set out the three kinds of vocation identified by the theologian Germain Grisez: “First, there is the *universal vocation* of all people to love God and neighbour; second, the *state in life vocation* of priesthood, religious life, marriage, or the single life; and third, *personal vocation*, the unique and ongoing call of God directed uniquely to one single individual.”

I wonder if the Church needs to do more to help young people respond to that first, universal vocation of love for God and neighbour. Recognising the call to love God and neighbour is the foundation of our state in life vocation and our personal vocation.

In December 2022, a group who pray for vocations invited me to share my story. I said that a year-long compulsory catechism class had taught me about the Catholic way of faith; that being an altar server and taking part in parish youth activities deepened my sense of the need for God as a teenager. I fell in love with God and the things of God, to the point of trying not to miss any church event – but I never for one moment thought about a vocation to the priesthood.

That started just before the end of secondary school when I was about to go to university. Suddenly, I couldn’t think of anything better than being a priest. In my heart of hearts, the longing was to be a priest who serves God and his people. I was able to make the bold decision to join the Spiritan seminary because my family and community provided an environment to respond first of all to the universal vocation, and then to the call to a certain state in life. There is no deeper sense of meaning and purpose than in fulfilling one’s God-given mission of love.

I feel that the lack of vocations to the priestly and religious life is the result of a limited response to the universal vocation. If people do not see the need for God, or a purpose for life, how could they discern that which their heart of hearts seeks?

Not everyone is called to the priestly or religious life but everyone is called to the universal vocation – including atheists. St Augustine said: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord.” Everyone has that persistent longing for something more (even most atheists will agree). That quest for fulfilment is a sign directing us to our universal vocation: it is our desire for God and God’s desire for us. God made us for Himself and only in Him do our hearts find rest.

Once we have discerned this universal vocation, some of us might recognise that a desire has grown in us for a further, specific stake in the mission of love.

During Flame 2023 at Wembley Arena in London, I was privileged to be one of the volunteers of the National Office for Vocation, talking to participants. One person I met had a professional career, but felt within her a call to be a religious. Her knowledge about her faith is still maturing – she is indecisive about what to do with the desire in her heart, and worries whether the religious life is really what her state in life should be. She seeks an explicit sign from God to confirm her desire.

We have all been in tight spots like this. Even in the precious vocation of married life, you meet people who a day before their wedding still question whether their partner is the right person for them. Vocations are somewhat mysterious. The sense of vocation comes from our very roots, from deep down in ourselves. It is something to be lived.

Benedict XVI once said that the truth of Christianity can be understood only in the laboratory of life by embarking on the experiment of faith. The confirmation of our vocation can be proven through the laboratory of life – by living the fullness of our vocation in the heart of the Church. Everything we need to discern our vocation journey is within, but guidance and inspiration from without can help us find it.

In 2014, Pope Francis told the Congregation for the Clergy: “The vocation is truly a treasure God places in the hearts of some men [and women], chosen by Him and called to follow Him in this special state of life. The treasure, which must be discovered and brought to light, is not made to ‘enrich’ someone alone.”

You must believe with your heart because that is where the treasure is hidden – and be prepared for some of the most wonderful and unexpected things to come about.

*Emmanuel Donkor is a Spiritan seminarian.*



## Someone will let you in

I like to call myself a witness to synodality, because I've been at every stage, from my local church to the diocesan level and then the continental assembly, and from there to Rome. At the end of the synod meeting in October, the Pope signed a letter requesting that I be excused a few university classes once I got back. My mom got it framed.

The synod's key message to young people is: "This is your Church, too." We're all on this mission together.

Some of the older generations might not see eye to eye with us; some of them might just see us as tomorrow's problem. But I don't think God sent us here to clean up older generations' messes. We're here to preach, to lead, to be the salt of the Earth – not salty to other people.

The people leading our Church also want that. They want to hear our voices. We should think of the Synod on Synodality as showing that servants of the Lord also serve other servants of the Lord, not just "others". This is taking us into the modern era.

Some people in the Church, even leaders, might not get along with each other, but as young people we can show them what it means to disagree but still keep that focus on Christ. At every stage of the synod, I got to see this happen. This is where the Church

is moving to, a Church that treats humans as human beings first.

When we received the synthesis document at the end of the synod discussions, I got a little emotional at how beautiful it is that our Church could put so much into it. Young people and our concerns were mentioned on 11 of the 40 pages. It didn't name LGBTQ+ people as such, but called on us to listen to the "people who feel marginalised or excluded from the Church because of their marriage status, identity or sexuality".

If it had been just bishops and cardinals who showed up, I don't think that would have been put into the document. But because we were alongside each other we had conversations, and with that we learned about each other's responsibilities and roles in the Church. As a catechist in my diocese, I've got to be on the frontline; I'm with the people all the time. And talking to bishops showed me that they're just normal other dudes – part of the people, too.

The document clearly isn't perfect, but it's amazing that it could include some of what we think, and it shows why it's so important to have young people involved in synodality, right from the listening sessions at the start. One of the difficulties is telling them about the sessions: we can put a notice in the bulletin, but young people

don't always pick up the bulletin after Mass every week like older people might. They might not be at Mass every week.

So how do we get them through the door? Sometimes we just need constant reminders in the announcements – it shows we really want young people there – or maybe something more inventive. At the synod we talked about the digital world and how it can help more people to become involved. Watching a one-minute homily on TikTok is great: you can't experience the true presence of Jesus Christ through a screen, but it's a start and the Holy Spirit moves through everything.

If we are welcoming young people this way, it can't be one size fits all, progressive or traditional: we all have to come together in our Church. And don't push anybody away. The struggle I had growing up was people telling me, "No, you can't be here, you're too young, you can't sit with us today, you can't do that." But I encourage young people to push and push because eventually you'll break through and find your place. Someone will let you in.

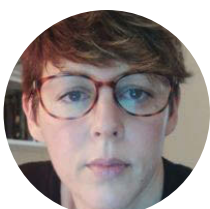
*Wyatt Olivas is a music education major at the University of Wyoming. He has served as a catechist and music minister in the Diocese of Cheyenne. Aged 19, he was the youngest delegate to the Synod on Synodality in Rome last October.*



Tablet Webinar

### Women and the Church: Are women discerning their baptismal calling?

*"To enable the flowering of the feminine is to make the Church whole."*



Join Anne-Marie O'Riordan, research associate at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology as she looks at why the Catholic Church should have a serious conversation with a wide range of contemporary Catholic women and ask them who they understand themselves to be and what their baptismal callings are. In the spirit of Pope Francis' recent Apostolic Letter to theologians, *Ad theologiam promovendam*, she asks why the Church isn't heeding the call to gather this vital information as part of the ongoing synodal process.

Wednesday 15 May 2024, 6pm – 7pm BST

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# How to be fully alive

On 25 March 2019 in the Holy House of Loreto in Italy, Pope Francis signed his post-synodal exhortation for the Synod on Young People. How does his message sound five years later? By Sophia Rayzan

ALAMY/PIXSELL, MARKO LUKUNIC



A young Catholic greets Pope Benedict in Croatia

It is refreshing to know that the leader of the Catholic Church has his ears open to the voices and changing ideas of young people. *Christus Vivit* – “Christ is alive” – is a 299-paragraph document addressed “to young people and to the entire people of God” and is written with great affection.

Why does that matter? Because it can be easy to lose sight of anything, let alone faith, if you do not feel considered. It is with this in mind that Pope Francis wrote *Christus Vivit* – to inspire specifically the faith of young people, the sort of faith he finds in the models of youthful saints such as Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc and Thérèse of Lisieux, as well as in biblical figures such as Jesus in his youth.

The Pope says the Church should embody “the beauty of youth” and deliberates on how to renew youth ministry and attract younger people to the Church in a world that is increasingly closing in on itself. He says he allowed himself to be “inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations” that took place in October 2018 at the Synod on Young

People, Faith and Vocational Discernment, where bishops from across the world gathered.

*Christus Vivit* does not dismiss the questionable history of the Church. The document acknowledges its promotion of male domination and clericalist protection for those who have committed “the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience, sexual and financial abuse”. In fact, the Pope encourages young people to keep priests true to their vows and vocations: “[If] you see a priest at risk, because he has lost the joy of his ministry, or seeks affective compensation, or is taking the wrong path, remind him of his commitment to God and his people, remind him of the Gospel and urge him to hold to his course. In this way, you will contribute greatly to something fundamental: preventing these atrocities from being repeated.” The Church has to repair its reputation with young people, he writes, otherwise it will have to accept the risk of becoming a “museum”.

My own curiosity for faith came about later in my teenage years, and I understand the

difficulty of enlightening young people through faith. Having been an impartial spectator for so long, I can see that one of the main problems for the Church is its lack of listening to younger people – particularly those who are *not* part of the Church community. This is enlightenment: the task of encouraging young people to follow Jesus’ teachings and to live through faith is a challenge on both sides, especially at a time of growing discontentment with the world. There is the rising cost of living, finding yourself unable to buy a round for your friends, the competitive job market, isolation, addiction. For young people, finding a path to holiness in a hostile world is increasingly difficult. Having faith in the teachings of Christ and encouraging young people to live life fully in the spirit of Christ requires *perspective*.

That is what Pope Francis seeks to convey in *Christus Vivit*. He says that we are called by God to be fully alive, not restricted, and his writing reflects on the richness and power that fully alive young people bring to the Church. It is the twenty-first-century obstacles to the life of faith for young people – isolation, over-consumption of media, addiction to drugs and pornography – that “rob you of hope and joy”.

“... being young is not only about pursuing fleeting pleasures and superficial achievements. If the years of your youth are to serve their purpose in life, they must be a time of generous commitment, whole-hearted dedication, and sacrifices that are difficult but ultimately fruitful.” Christ wants us to be alive in the fullest sense.

The crucial things are vocation and good discernment – “a path of freedom that brings to full fruit what is unique in each person, something so personal that only God knows it”. And whatever our own disheartening experiences of divorce and separation, it is worth “your every effort to invest in the family” so as not to be “robbed of a great love”.

It’s reciprocal: the Church offers so much to and needs so much from the young. “May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them!”

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# Living religion

Two books from religious orders especially concerned with young people and education show how the Church should look and feel, on the ground and day to day

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## THE SALESIAN. By Mariae Beatriz Guevarra

In *A Young Adult's Guide to Life* (Don Bosco Publications, £7), Fr David O'Malley SDB offers a thought-provoking, encouraging exploration of themes of hardship, fulfilment and how to navigate life as a young Catholic. This book – an update of Don Bosco's own *Companion of Youth* – is an enriching yet simple guide to upholding Salesian teachings and how to implement them while experiencing the journey through life.

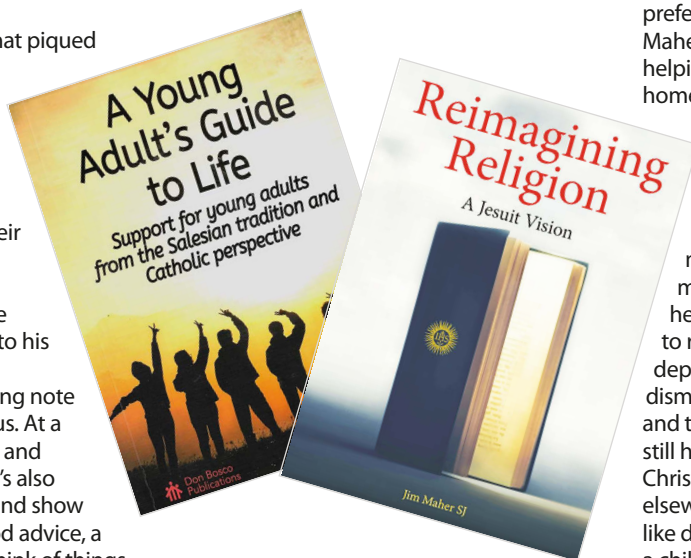
O'Malley begins with a phrase that piqued my interest: "Young people not only need to be loved, but they also need to know that they are loved." His introduction to and breakdown of Salesian values quite simply reminds readers that love is present in their lives and that it is an ongoing matter. He singles out a specific value: Loving Kindness. There are relatable, practical acts that link to his utmost point of cherishing the importance of kindness and taking note of its place in the world around us. At a time when competition, success and financial stability are idealised, it's also important to build community and show loving kindness. I found this good advice, a prompt to take a moment and think of things beyond school and work.

Don Bosco's four factors can build a healthy spiritual life – and O'Malley argues they should break down the misconception that practising spirituality predominantly happens at church. To practise spirituality is not to follow a rigid step-by-step ritual but instead can happen when we are interacting with others in the playground or at home with our family.

O'Malley then focuses on the individual reading the book and breaks down the struggles a young Catholic may face as he or she grows from a child to an adult with ten times more responsibility. Non-Catholics, too, could take something away from this book and perhaps feel less lost about their place in the world than before. O'Malley understands a young adult's need to fit in with their own or societal standards: he encourages people to be themselves, all the while subtly linking this

to religious teaching – a simple yet impactful way to provide his advice.

He also offers advice on relationships – an important subject, given the influence that our environment and the media have on people's perception of how relationships should function and the "roles" that people have within any relationship. Healthy relationships and friendships are essential, he argues: "Friends are important to flourishing



as human beings." A "friendship checklist" is a simple aid to discerning whether a friendship is healthy or not.

O'Malley begins his chapter focusing on Catholicism by advising that "healthy religions develop their thinking as change happens", contrary to a fear that many young adults may have that religion is unchanging. Explaining the details of Catholic Social Teaching and how to practise Catholicism breaks down the mysticism around how to go through life as a Catholic. He also introduces the idea of prayer and its use, offering common examples. Prayer is, O'Malley writes, quoting an anonymous medieval author, a "cloud of unknowing". This, I think, is a perfect description of how it feels to enter a state of prayer. It offers a guide for those unfamiliar with what prayer is like.

*Mariae Beatriz Guevarra is a sixth-former at St Michael's Catholic College, Bermondsey.*

## THE JESUIT. By Patrick Hudson

The demand for "the spiritual" in the Western world is more pronounced than ever but mainstream religious observance seems to be in chronic decline. Although this may seem a cause for despair among Christians, Fr Jim Maher SJ believes that it should prompt us to recalibrate how we think and talk about essential truths. Published last year, *Reimagining Religion: A Jesuit Vision* (Messenger Publications, £18.95) looks at how we encounter those truths – the millennia-old superstructure that we call "religion" – with confidence and realism, arguing that Catholic Christianity must live more honestly in the present if it is to make the most of its spiritual strengths. The Society of Jesus has been making this sort of argument in every century since its foundation, and it is the four Jesuit preferences announced in 2019 which frame Maher's book: aiding spiritual discernment, helping the excluded, caring for our common home and journeying with youth.

Maier has spent most of his ministry at a secondary school in Limerick. His affection for the Church and his frustration with its failure to interact meaningfully with many young people is mirrored in his pitch to the young people he deals with: they need to learn to bring to religion the same critical faculties they deploy with other subjects, rather than dismiss it out of hand. Rather than learning and thinking about the subject, most of us still have a "primary school" grasp of Christianity. An English nun has written elsewhere that, for many people, religion is like drawing – a skill pursued and indulged as a child, but so neglected in adulthood that we're left churning out stick figures if we ever draw at all. That so many people leave the Church isn't the problem for Maher; it's that those who dismiss a stick-figure faith don't know what they're losing.

What makes this analysis more compelling than the usual "why-oh-why" fare peddled on both sides in most arguments about Church reform is the author's sense of his worlds. He happily mixes up our cultural hinterland of Yeats, Wordsworth and Dostoevsky, of Borat and *Father Ted*, with rich theology and an appreciation of the unintellectual mechanics of Hail Marys and Our Fathers which are the currency of our religious observance. Maher even makes a thoughtful defence of the workaday Mass and the much-maligned family Rosary. His reimagined religion is the familiar made new, the mechanics reinvented to help us see what was always there.

## Reviews

ALAMY/LANDMARK MEDIA



Juliette Binoche and Benoît Magimel in *The Taste of Things*

### EXHIBITION: An odditorium of imagination

When you enter Fairyland, you never know what to expect, writes *Matilda Warner*. A wishing well, the glint of a fairie's wing, a house where all is not as it seems. But what about "Ulysses' Shippe", Valhalla, Avalon, a few merfolk perched casually on a nearby rock? We do know these shadowy figures, these towering rockfaces and misted walls. They are part of our collective imagination, our sense of the nebulous world beyond our own.

They are also all part of the gloriously eclectic *Ancient mappe of Fairyland*, created by Bernard Sleight in 1918. This wide, wonderful creation greeted me as I stepped under the twinkling archway into the British Library's exhibition "Fantasy: Realms of Imagination". The day already had a bizarre tint to it because I'd bumped into a friend at King's Cross station. (It is a truth universally acknowledged that London is too big for coincidence. Or is it?)

As with the best exhibitions, it was a spider's web of its subject, catching every era and facet you could think of, holding them all in a kaleidoscopic gaze. I have since bought a print of the *Mappe*; it will take me a good while to read every intricate

label. Enchantingly bizarre, it was the perfect introduction to an exhibition encompassing the many influences of fantasy.

"Fantasy deals in impossible things," the exhibition catalogue says. A kind of odditorium of imagination, the curation showcased an undeniable cultural change, a crack revealing the unreal. There was something in the air: contrary to fantasy's reputation, it was possibility.

Some gems sparkled more than others. There was the 1926 first edition of Hope Mirrlees' novel *Lud-in-the-Mist*, a little-known influence on Neil Gaiman which I had just finished reading – another bolt from the meant-to-be blue. Other highlights included the notebooks from writers as diverse as Ursula Le Guin (*A Wizard of Earthsea*) and Michael Palin (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*) and, thrillingly, the very staff and accompanying pipe-pouch that Ian McKellen carried as Gandalf.

Fairytales and legends are part of a long lineage of stories that have always held a special sort of power, at once epic and deeply personal. From ancient oral tradition to today's online fandoms and conventions, the genre of fantasy has expanded exponentially. It feels as if there's an endless range of subgenres,

with "romantasy" the current chart-topper in the publishing business. There was something for everyone in the exhibition, and I felt the excitement among the visitors that day. Branching out of the familiar, Westernised view of fantasy, the next rooms contained items from all around the world, showing how common themes connect us all.

Fantasy allows us not only to escape the everyday, but to seek a new view of our own world, clues to how to live the everyday more wisely, bravely and joyously. We learn to expect the unexpected and to cherish the friends we meet along the way. The veil of possibility stayed with me that day, as I ran into another friend in an entirely different part of town. In fantasy, the powerful idea is formed, and never quite forgotten, that by creating and sharing something unreal, the artist makes it, to all intents and purposes, real.

*The exhibition closed on 25 February. The accompanying book Realms of Imagination: Essays from the Wide Worlds of Fantasy (edited by Tanya Kirk and Matthew Sangster) is available from British Library Publishing at £30.*

### FILM: Cuisine of astonishing grace

I don't think I've ever seen celeriac in a film before, writes *Maximilian Yuen*. As the root emerges from the soil in the opening shot of *The Taste of Things*, knobbly and dark and capped with a huge plume of leaves, filling the screen with a certain quiet majesty, it makes it clear that this is a film in which food will be a main character. And what food there is! Veal and sweetbreads and cockerels' combs; turbot and bottled pears and ortolan warblers. There are cardoons, vol-au-vents, pigeons and crayfish, and there are bottles of old Burgundy, from which the dust whirls when blown.

It's also a film about people who make food, eat food and love through food. Dodin Bouffant (Benoît Magimel) is a castle-dwelling gourmet in the 1880s,

and Eugénie (Juliette Binoche) his cook. The first half-hour is almost without dialogue, as the two of them prepare a lunch of five courses. It is mesmerising, audacious and calm – a welcome riposte to the usual televised kitchen, where pots clang and men shout and sweat drips. Dodin and Eugénie take food far too seriously to treat it like that; they approach their science with respect and humility.

The result is a cuisine of astonishing grace. As one of their friends touches a spoon of consommé to his lips, his praise is: "How subtle!" Food today seems to mean weirder spices, bigger colours, flashier plates, more crunch, more melt, more ooze – always something new, always something different. How often do we think about subtlety? Dodin is horrified to dine with a prince whose menu includes a dozen soups, every conceivable beast, all manner of delicacies and an array of showy wines. The eight-hour meal is pompous and, most damningly, thoughtless. More thought goes into a fish stock in Dodin's kitchen than into the prince's entire banquet.

In many ways, *The Taste of Things* – released in France as *La Passion de Dodin Bouffant* – mirrors the cooking it celebrates. It is subtle. There are long tracking shots and expansive scenes, and nothing is flashy or overblown or affected. The light is warm and rich and the same colour as Eugénie's broth. And just as Dodin's dishes appear simple, but require hours of stock-making and months of vegetable growing and a lifetime's experience to make, this too is a film about food which is also about love and loss and renewal, and which is far more complex than it might sound. As a joint of veal is brought to the table, a friend stops mid-sentence, gasps, "*Mon dieu*," and the six men seated fall into reverent silence. As the credits played, there was something of the same atmosphere in the cinema.

*The Taste of Things (12A) is available to stream.*



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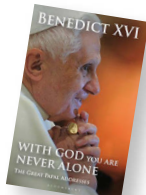
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