



Into Extra Time

Living through the final stages of cancer and jottings along the way

Michael Paul Gallagher

'My path towards death is certain, a question of months ... [Into Extra Time] tries to tell the story of a believer going through stages of cancer. If it offers some spiritual light for others in such times of struggle, that justifies it for me.'

Michael Paul Gallagher

"There are tunnels of lonely exhaustion when I seem unwilling to cross the room but they don't last more than an hour or so. Remembering a word of prayer, both body and mood rise, like a healing surprise of being unalone. Sometimes it ripens into joy and thanksgiving, recalling so many blessings and gifts. I rest in peace, love... Even the body seems to find strength, or to be less crushed by its forms of heaviness. Hard to put into words, but it happens."

In January 2015, priest and theologian, Michael Paul Gallagher, was diagnosed with cancer - he had a tumour, 'a nasty one' according to his doctor. After months of chemotherapy Gallagher succumbed to the disease, passing away in November 2015.

Into Extra Time is Gallagher's final book, written in the knowledge that his death was imminent. It started as a diary for himself, trying to explore his experience of illness. But it became clear that the story of a believer going through stages of cancer could offer some spiritual light for others in such times of struggle. Gallagher elaborated: 'Sometimes people outside faith imagine believers as living within a secure tower of certitude and of consolation. Not so. Even without a crisis of illness, faith is always an adventure of darkness and light, seeing through a glass darkly. And when the shock of a life-threatening disease comes, at least in my experience, both the darkness and the light become more intense.'

The book is split into sections. The first dealing with themes that people of faith suffering terminal illness may come face to face with, from darkness and revelation to springboards including imagination, transformation and transcendence. The second section serves as Gallagher's own emotive cancer diary, evoking what he termed the 'waves of fog and shafts of light' central in his experience, perhaps best summed up by the moment of self-revelation that 'when I am alert I can pray with quiet joy and gratitude, and when I enter some of the inner fogs I remember St Paul saying when you cannot pray, the Spirit will pray within you.' *Into Extra Time* ends with poems composed while in hospital including: 'Quartet'.

Michael Paul Gallagher was a priest, lecturer and popular author on faith and culture. His books for DLT include *Faith Maps* and *Clashing Symbols*. He died in November 2015 from cancer.

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QUARTET

Dr Google the world renowned consultant
Knows everything about cancer
And spouts out blunt statistics
Data you cannot argue with.
I prefer the oncologist's discretion,
But between the lines
The message is the same:
This time we won't win.
How to respond?
Shakespeare puts it best:
Love that well
Which you must leave e'er long,
But Simeon suggests more –
Go in peace
Your hopes fulfilled.
Amen.