

Ballyvaloo

20 August 2021

Welcome

As we heard in the story of the Transfiguration, it has been good to be here. This is a very attractive and welcoming place, with a location second to none, with nice walks, the huge beach and the wonderful sea air. As for the retreat, this style is a kind of slow burner and I know it takes a day or two or three to become attuned to what's going on. I'm very convinced of the need to combine some kind of praying with Scripture and some kind of quiet prayer. We need the quiet prayer, simply to sit before the mystery of God. We need the Scripture to keep us grounded in love, service and conversion.

Topic

Perhaps I could indicate attitudes and practices which might help.

Steps

From our close reading of St Paul, we begin to get a picture of what kept him going. The foundation is always the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loyal love and faithfulness." (Exodus 34:6 NET). His encounter with Christ brought that faithfulness to a new depth: God's grace is now for all humanity without distinction. The intensity of Paul's attachment to Christ is impressive, setting bar very high. The same encounter also shaped Paul's career and his style as an apostle. As we saw several times, he is remarkably self-sufficient, carefree and truly caring in equal measure. Because he is so "indifferent", in Ignatius' sense, he can be fully engaged. He has indeed learned he secret of contentment. That gift is offered to us all.

It may be for some of you the praying with scripture will have refreshed your enthusiasm for the Word of God. Pope Benedict used a very poetic description for the Bible: *the Book is the very voice of the pilgrim People of God, and only within the faith of this People are we, so to speak, attuned to understand sacred Scripture.* (Verbum Domini 30). Lectio is a method which uses our experience to unlock the Scriptures and uses the Scriptures to illuminate what is happening in our lives. It can be continued alone but there is a great advantage in doing lectio with others – the sheer breadth of experience and reaction really enriches the prayer. And there are plenty of resources online or in print.

It may also be that the emphasis on quiet prayer has awaked again a hunger for the prayer of presence and a desire to have it more regularly in your life. The somewhat austere way we did might not be for everyone, but surely some kind of "sitting with God" without words is part of the journey. Such quiet prayer can easily be done alone, but as you will have felt, there is a great advantage in doing such meditation with others. There is even a great advantage in the double meditation – you can feel the accumulated stillness in the room.

The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) offers all sorts of guidance and support. They can also be contacted for local groups if you felt being part of one would be for you. The Irish contact is Noel Keating. One of the fruits of Covid 19 has been a growth in online communities of meditation. Laurence Freeman OSB has a meditation centre in Bonnevaux in France and it is possible to join in the meetings online. Just google Bonnevaux and you'll see an amazing array of help.

Conclusion

If something good happened for you on retreat, you might give some time to wondering how it can be sustained in your everyday life. For that to happen, some choices will necessary and some concrete proposals. My own crumb of wisdom is this. Meditation and lectio, but perhaps especially meditation, are best done at the same time, in the same place, with the same routine. We just need to the support of the regular. Of course it won't be always possible to keep to such a routine – work or family or holidays, for example, will intervene. But by and large, we benefit from routine – not having to make our up minds each day when and where and how. The gentle call to deeper engagement, even though only a still small voice, should not be ignored!