

God delights in our trying.

St. Matthew reminds us to 'Love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself.'

There are times, however, when our ability to do this evades us and instead of travelling with our 'hearts high', we are filled with worry, sadness, exhaustion or loneliness. No wonder our neighbours and God can get a hard time of it! We feel that no matter what we try to do, we are left with just the broken shells of our poor efforts. We may even give up trying to be close to God altogether.

You see, we cannot really love others until we are equally involved in loving ourselves and for this to happen we have to accept who we are. Warts and all. This really is a challenge in today's society where great emphasis is placed on success and perfection. Yet it is something we must strive to do. To love ourselves and accept ourselves for whom we really are. To acknowledge that, no matter what, we have been chosen, blessed, created for God and in God and with God. Of accepting that there is within each one of us a deep and enriching fountain of love. We have to look no further than within ourselves for God's loving and guiding presence.

St Catherine of Genoa knew this fact when she ran through the streets shouting 'God is the deepest most part of myself.'

When we begin to accept, even just a little, that we are truly loved and that this love is our deepest nature, then it will begin (maybe slowly at first) to renew and refresh our lives. As I write these words I feel shocked at how often I have to remind myself of their wisdom. I go through phases when I feel that I am not fully giving myself to God. My prayers are half hearted. I start and then get distracted. I mean to try harder next time but never quite manage to. All this can leave me feeling disappointed with myself. What does God make of my efforts? From listening to others I know that I am not alone in feeling this way. It happens to us all. It is during times when we feel so challenged that we need to be lovingly and gently reminded of our own inner loveliness.

*May the light of your soul guide you.
May the light of your soul bless the work
you do with the secret love and warmth of your heart.
May you see in what you do, the beauty of your own soul.
(from May the Light of your Soul Guide You by John O'Donohue)*

I am learning to accept and trust that, no matter what we think of our own efforts, God delights in our trying and that the source of this trying comes from within our own inner 'God like' selves. It is God who is calling us and urging us on from both within and without of the very 'beauty of our own souls'.

This struck me only yesterday afternoon. My eldest daughter has finished her GCSE's and had been trying to help me at home by doing a few jobs. When I came home from work I was greeted by the gorgeous smell of cake...and the mess! She had received a phone call and got distracted. In the lounge, the ironing board was still up, iron on and clothes in a heap. The washing she had promised to hang on the washing line was still in the machine.

After a quick flash of frustration and a few big, deep breaths, I realised that she had done a fantastic job. OK, all might not have been finished, but her intention to help and please was evident. Her desire to do good far outweighed the fact that no job was yet finished. In that moment I realised that God's pleasure in us is not in our completing a task to the highest of standards, but the willingness to begin the task. And to keep beginning. Mother Teresa said, 'Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do... but how much love we put in that action.' My daughters desire to give me a helping hand was this 'love put into action.' It was itself an utterance to me of God's love and delight. And, like God, I didn't care about the finished product, just the fact that she began in the first place. Odd though it may seem to say it, stood amongst the mess I felt that I couldn't love her any more than at that very moment.

And so I have made a few decisions. The decision to begin again: To begin the task of loving myself and all my efforts. Those that I complete, those that I get half way through and those that I mean to begin but never actually do. To begin accepting that God loves every scrap of my efforts and moreover that she delights in them all. To begin to accept that every time we struggle, every time we feel challenged, we are presented with an opportunity to travel from difficulty to acceptance, from the constraints of darkness to the renewing freedom of light. And in doing so I have decided to begin to let peace enter my heart, mind and body once more.