

A new beginning

The scent of Spring is in the air and with it has come a flurry of activity in our home. Dusty teenage bedrooms are being 'sorted out', with windows flung wide open and curtains billowing in cool, March breezes. Oxygen is revitalising those dark places that haven't had fresh air circulating for many a month. It is out with the old and in with the new. My daughters are having a spring clean...big style! A fresh start is within their grasp and they have all suddenly become full of renewed energy.

Since being asked to write for this website a short while ago I too have felt filled with this sense of 'renewed energy'. I am always yearning and searching for God, always struggling to discover the fullness of love and truth that God is. This yearning is so powerful at times that I am sure that I have already been given a taste of God and the tremendous love in which I am held. Anthony de Mello captures this searching in his story of the little ocean fish who is swimming frantically and looking for 'the ocean'. He eventually meets a wise older fish....

"Excuse me," said the little, ocean fish, "You are older than I so can you tell me where to find this thing they call the Ocean?"

"The Ocean," said the older fish, "is the thing you are in now,"

"Oh, this? But this is water. What I'm seeking is the Ocean," said the disappointed fish as he swam away to search elsewhere.

Stop searching, little fish. There isn't anything to look for. All you have to do is look.

Let us open our sails to the wind of the Spirit without knowing on what shores we will land.

Jerome

I am a learning heart and, unlike the ocean fish who listened but didn't truly hear the advice given to him, I am learning that it is in this very looking that we can become aware of God's divine presence in all things. God is not out of reach and doesn't remain hidden to us despite our frantic effortsbut is present in all aspects of our lives as well as in the deep recesses of each human heart and mind. It is God's tremendous love that is presented to us in the many ordinary moments of our lives, if we could but be truly aware. God is absolutely everywhere and I try to look around me each day and identify the nearness of Grace and the presence of God in all that I do. When I do manage to do this then I am filled with a deep sense of how close I am to God and then my spirits lift and soar as I marvel at the mystery and wonder of what we call life. I am made aware of the freedom within my grasp and the endless possibilities that lie before me if I but throw all my energies into being more fully aware of God's most precious presence.

I am an ordinary lass - a wife and a mum to three, lovely girls, two of whom are teenagers. I have been a teacher for 18 years now and currently teach in a large secondary school. My life at the moment is full, busy and at times ever so slightly chaotic. In between washing, ironing (well - watching the pile grow!), cooking, cleaning, marking books, preparing lessons, sorting out teenage problems and all the daily chores that life sends my way I try to remember that these are not just chores but moments of grace. When we look back at what a day has held then we can get a sense of the wonders that have passed us by. If we think about all that has taken place - analyse even - then we can become more aware of the many moments of grace that we have experienced. And those we didn't experience because we weren't looking closely enough. As a family we like to look at old holiday photos and discuss the highlight such as: best holiday, best meal, best trip, best experience, best activity etc. All sorts of lovely memories are dug up and the dust blown from them so that they can be enjoyed afresh. However - although these 'biggies' jump out at us we mustn't forget to look a little more closely and view the ordinary times also. It is often in these that our most graced moments occur - on a daily basis too. Those many, many meals lovingly prepared for the family and shared together. The care of others, shown to us when we are not feeling well. The kindness of complete strangers. The gifts offered by nature. The growing and developing of our children...first steps, new skills, conflicts resolved, love given freely. It is in our ordinary, daily lives that we experience the wonderful gifts of grace offered to us by God.

A simple example of this was during a lesson last week when I took a class into the Star Dome - a huge inflatable dome where animations and images of space can be projected onto the inner canvas. As the

young people sat in the inky darkness and watched in awe at the magnificent spectacle of the birth of a star...I too watched in wonder at their shadowed, awe struck faces and became acutely aware of the beautiful creations that they are. Their beauty is truly God's beauty.

Having a learning heart means standing on the threshold of a new beginning with the hope of new horizons,

*'where we stand in the tremble of thought
taking the vast outside into ourselves.'*

Each new day holds many, many wonders if we, in both struggles and joys alike, try to just 'Look, see and recognise,' the presence of our tender and loving God. My 'Letters from a learning heart,' will try to reflect on such moments as these. So as I watch my daughters in action and feel the energy and enthusiasm they are radiating as they spruce up their rooms, singing and dancing as they work, it is apparent to me that in this simple and ordinary moment in our day is also a wonderful moment in which I am learning to become more truly aware of the real experience of God.