

Learning to delight in silence.

It is 9.20 am on the first day of the new summer term. The Easter holidays have come and gone in a flurry of activity and I am now sitting alone in my house, having sent everyone safely on their way. I am already missing the company of my family. There are, of course, lots of jobs to be done but I am in no mood to start. After the busyness and noise that spending two weeks together brings, I am suddenly very aware of the silence and stillness around me.

In his Genesee Diary, Henri Nouwen reveals his daily struggles with silence during the seven months he spent in a Trappist Monastery. He bravely stepped back from his busy schedule of teaching and writing because of the lack of space and silence in his life. He slowly became aware of the false tensions he brought to his life and that, if he lived more fully in the stillness within the present moment then,
“..my mind would be more vacant for God and freer for the simple things of every moment.”

It is these ‘simple things of every moment’ that I am trying to experience. I have started to sit still at some point each day. Ten minutes or so to relax and breathe slowly and calmly. To let go of my anxieties. To just be at peace. The wonderful thing is that this silence, which I have always been afraid of, has caused something within me to shift slightly. An element of something new is beginning to emerge and I am learning that silence can be rich and full and beautiful.

As I sit in the stillness this morning I have begun to think about our family breakfast. This is a time I usually take for granted but in the silence I let my mind dwell on the events of the morning. To see them once again but more closely this time. It has occurred to me that I take for granted that one of my daughters always makes the toast for the whole family. Every day, she plasters on the butter and spreads on the toppings we want, as if she were carrying out an important ritual. It dawned on me this morning that she is. She truly really wants to please us. She has taken this role to heart and by this simple act she is enriching our lives. I can see now that this busy meal can also be a time of giving and receiving. A time when we can bless each other.

In these first few weeks of the Easter season, the Gospels retell us that the disciples found it hard to recognise the risen Jesus, even though he came and stood among them. The priest poet Gerard Manly Hopkins expresses beautifully in his poem, As Kingfishers Catch Fire, of the presence of the risen Christ in all creation. He wrote

‘Christ plays in ten thousand places, and lovely limbs and lovely eyes not his...’.

In the stillness of my home this morning something very precious has been revealed. I have been reminded, through the actions of my daughter, that we have all been graced with an inner loveliness, a sacred presence within our very being. In our very limbs, and eyes, and hands buttering bread we are graced with the hidden richness that is Christ. This is there within all of us and, if revealed in our lives and through our actions, can bring delight to those we encounter. These silent moments have been an important time in revealing a deeper way of seeing my day, my family and of loving them. I feel very aware that it is not really a ‘missing time’. It is a time of revelation. A time to hold them closer than ever and to be thankful for the grace that they are in my life.