

2012

### Week 19 - Wheelchair Hearts

I am alone for a moment – at the bar on the ferry home, half-way between Calais and Dover. It is a Sunday morning and the sun is shining on the green-blue sea. Or parish pilgrimage to Lourdes for holiday and healing is almost over. Our hearts are full of stories of pain and joy, of some dark moments and many bright ones, of shared secrets and glimpses of the mystery of our human spirit.

Holidays and healing. They go together. They go together at many levels of experience. For instance, we were all in a new environment. Our winter bodies were plunged into a continental summer. The often lonely routine of our predictable daily lives was suddenly and delightfully transformed into a community context of compassion.

Holiday and mystery and paradox. Let me try to explain. At Lourdes – this metropolis of teeming emotion – everything is turned around. It is a place of divine contradiction. It is a humbling experience for those whose hearts are open. It is here that we are brought to our knees. We begin again to realise that God's ways are not ours and we surrender to a higher, loving Providence.

This paradox was played out in many ways during the past week of holiday and healing. Our leaders, in their handbook encouraged us to come 'with minds open to the spirit, prepared to put our whole selves into the moment.' What came up for us at times of sharing surprised us. We, the giving helpers, began to realise that truly we were the receivers.

The roles were somehow reversed. Even though we were the ones who walked behind the wheelchairs of our physically unable sisters and brothers, we were in fact the ones who were blessed with the privilege of being their servants. And so often too, it was us the 'able-bodied', with our unable bodies in emotional wheelchairs, who so desperately needed holiday and healing through the loving acceptance of our 'guests.' Within our group there were stories told of such small 'miracles'. Lourdes, we agreed, is not the place for wearing masks. (*Passion for the Possible* pp175,176)