

2012

Week 4 - Contemplative Oasis

The much mentioned spiritual hunger of people today is not, I feel sure, for more religion or church activities. It is for contemplative space, for an inner freedom, for tastes and glimpses of their own elusive beauty. During a vacation, a real sabbatical, we make room for dreaming, for rediscovering the kernel of our being, for playing safely with bare feet. If sin, in scripture, is about 'missing the mark' – something that happens when we follow misleading maps and unreliable compasses – then Sabbath-time is for a lot of re-routing, for some fairly urgent U-turns and for finding a way out of the many newly discovered cul-de-sacs we have been lost in.

In a Tablet article some years ago, the Benedictine Sister Joan Chtitester pointed out that we have substituted more labour, hard play or work-out leisure for soul-searching and reflection, for intimacy and awareness. Our culture turns the Sabbath into a race for escape, an opportunity for more addictions, a collection of distractions. We cannot stop to do much about anything. We pack even more into the week-end, using it to mop up what spills over from the working week. We take the children to play in the park while we finish writing a weekly or monthly report. The Sabbath has become catch-up time instead of reflection-time.

These days were intended to be an opportunity for remembering a different life-rhythm, for resisting the relentless drive to overwork, for arresting the way that our ordinary daily routine takes over. 'If you don't live your life, your life will live you.' Such days are important because they keep us focused on a reality, a way of being that includes but transcends, the usual patterns of days and weeks. They take us back to our sources in God and remind us of the destiny our heaven. And, in between, they keep before us the comforting assurance that, whatever the mountains we have to climb, we are not alone, that our lives are permeated by the Holy Spirit.

(Already Within: pp 93,94)