Vicar’s Letter for August 2016

Dear Friends

As I write I am just getting ready to go to a place in Wales for a few days of retreat. This is something the Diocese encourages (maybe even expects) clergy to do each year. And almost every year I manage to get the inside of a week away somewhere. This year I will be staying with a Roman Catholic Community. I haven’t been there before, but I am looking forward to it. Retreats take a variety of forms – some are themed to do with music or walking, painting or a theme in the Christian life. On some retreats the leader gives talks to the group, on others you meet individually with a spiritual guide once a day to share your prayer life. Some retreats are silent; some have periods of silence in the days. You can go for one day or for longer.

Over the years I have experienced many different types of retreat, and this year I will be going on a silent one. Some people look horrified at the thought of spending several days in silence, but I enjoy it. ‘What – no talking??!!’ ‘What – you mean no television/mobile phone/laptop..’ ‘What do you do all day then?’

A retreat, as the name suggests, is a period of time set aside when you can ‘retreat’ from everyday life, from its busyness and the everyday demands of life. A retreat is a time for a different time of meeting – not with things in your diary but with God. A retreat is a time when you lay aside ‘normal life’ and try to spend time at a different pace – with God. There is time to sleep, time to savour meals and not have to rush them in order to get to the next event in the day, time to think and ponder, time to ‘go slow’, time to pray and listen to God, whether that is through reading Scripture or going on a reflective walk. Time to just be.

That can be demanding, because we are not used to just being with ourselves, are we? We are used to being filled with noise – externally and internally, and it can be hard, even perhaps frightening, to let that noise drop away so we can just be ourselves, not having to be anyone for anybody, but just to be so we can hear God more truly. Sometimes God has to battle to be heard by us because of the noisy world we live in.

Many people who have tried retreats find it beneficial, even life-changing. It is not always easy to get away for a retreat. I can always think of other more ‘profitable’ things I could be doing if I stayed in Stretford and didn’t take a few days out for retreat. But I know that I need time away, time alone with God, time to reconnect with God on a deeper level and renew my covenant with God and remember my calling and purpose as a child of God. Time to recharge my spiritual batteries.

It’s not easy for some with family commitments to get away for a few days, but there are places which offer Quiet Days – space of the inside of a day to retreat from the world and focus on other matters: maybe in order to listen to what God has to say about a job offer, or whether to move house or not, or another decision that needs to be made in your life.

Sometimes there are retreats that are run one evening a week over the course of several months, and some people find those fit in with their life-styles the best. One such retreat is ‘Light out of Darkness’ which some members from St Matthew’s have attended in the past – you’ll find details of the next one advertised in this magazine. I really encourage you to think about attending this and why not attend the taster evening? One former participant writes this about it:

*‘During my time on the Light out of Darkness course, I discovered a lot about myself, God and my relationship with God. The course helped me to accept myself as I am and to know that God loves me for who I am. I was also able to reflect and see where God has been in my life even when I wasn’t aware of his presence. The course also helped me to become more disciplined in using daily prayer and reflection. Fellowship also played a big part in the course, as time went on I felt more confident and comfortable with sharing in the group.’*

Jesus himself took ‘time out’ to be with his Father, and encouraged his disciples to do the same – He said: ‘Come away with me. Let us go alone to a quiet place and rest for a while.' Many people were coming and going. They could not even eat. So they went away in a boat to a lonely place by themselves. (Mark 6: 31-32).

Does that busyness sound familiar to you? If so, perhaps you might like to consider going on a retreat or Quiet Day. May we all look for times to be in a quiet place with Jesus this August and in the months to come.

With every blessing

Kate