



## NOTES FROM SMMS RETREAT

*led by Sr. Gemma Simmonds CJ*

Aylesford Priory, May 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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### **FIRST ADDRESS**

“God can do in 2 days what he can do in 8!” (*Comment to a retreatant at St. Beuno's*)

If something irritates you, don't run from it. It *may* be there's something going on that needs attention.

Take note of the different things that attract your attention. They may have something important to communicate.

S. Ignatius taught that the Director of a Retreat is God. How you attend to God is ore important than how you attend to *me!*

Our primary vocation is found in our Baptism as Prophet, Priest and King. How do you live out of that vocation? How is God's relationship with you 'embodied'? How do you live out your social, sexual and connectional self that speaks of God being with you? We're called to join the failed prophet; the priest who gathered few, and the King crowned with thorns. What of late has been your experience of sharing in this call of Christ (have a conversation with Jesus)? What might His invitation, to you, be?

'A Sacrament is a sign that makes real what it signifies.' In what ways do we live, sacramentally?

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*Exercise:* What first called you to Christ – to His love and service? If you and Jesus were sitting together, what might He say to you about that call, that consecration?

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### **SECOND ADDRESS**



*All that matters is to be at one with the living God  
to be a creature in the house of the God of Life.  
Like a cat asleep on a chair at peace, in peace  
and at one with the master of the house, with the mistress,  
at home, at home in the house of the living,  
sleeping on the hearth, and yawning before the fire.  
Sleeping on the hearth of the living world  
yawning at home before the fire of life  
feeling the presence of the living God  
like a great reassurance a deep calm in the heart  
a presence*

*as of the master sitting at the board  
in his own and greater being,  
in the house of life.*

'Pax' – D. H. Laurence

*I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. (Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium 1:3)*

*"There is not a moment until our final breath when there is not an invitation to conversion."  
(Unknown)*

*With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!" (Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium 1: 3)*

*This is the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life, as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: "My child, treat yourself well, according to your means... Do not deprive yourself of the day's enjoyment" (Sir 14:11, 14). What tender paternal love echoes in these words! (Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium 1: 4)*

Pope Francis speaks of the 'revolution of tenderness' – tenderness towards others and tenderness towards ourselves. It is in prayer that we experience our need for, and capacity for, tenderness. "And what is tenderness?" he asked. "It is the love that comes close and becomes real. It is a movement that starts from our heart and reaches the eyes, the ears and the hands." (Video speech by Pope Francis to TED 2017 - TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks)

"What you desire you do not already possess but when you do desire you have the capacity for it." (St. Augustine – unattr.) Our life is to be 'exercised by desire', to hollow out a space for God. To get in touch with our deepest desire is to get in touch with something of our emptiness. Of our need.

The desire for God is, in itself, a grace and the opposite of faith if not doubt but indifference – "do I care?"

'In prayer we discover what we already have. You start where you are and you deepen what you already have, and you realize that you are already there. We already have everything, but we don't know it and we don't experience it. Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess.' *Merton on Prayer and Time, part 1*

*"The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon" (Jn 1:39).' (Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium 2: 13)*

When we die it will be our sins that are our glory. It will be the struggle that is remembered (*att. Julian of Norwich?*)

How do we experience the 'sacramentality of the ordinary'? In beholding the Divine Presence in the Blessed Sacrament do we look beyond and behold the Divine Presence in all things? Give thanks – *eucharistos* (εὐχαρίστο) – in all things?

If 'Eucharist' is important, so is reconciliation. Reconciliation in all things; to be reconciled with all the dead and broken things in us – 'like wheat that springeth green'. Where most in my life do I need reconciliation? By His wounds we have been healed – through our wounds comes our healing.

'I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.' (Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium* 49)

### THIRD ADDRESS

#### FOURTH ADDRESS – The Sacramentality of the Ordinary: *Reconciliation*

In relation to the Parable of the Prodigal Son, do we have a 'good brother' and a 'bad brother' in ourselves? The petition in the Our Father, *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*, places reconciliation on a par with receiving our 'daily bread'.

Are we merciful towards ourselves? How do we know that we are forgiven or that we *have* forgiven? Forgiveness is not easily obtained or given; it is a grace from God. What we desire gives us the capacity to receive it. We need, each day, to 'hollow out' the capacity to forgive.

Do we need to re-affirm the Sacrament of Reconciliation in our churches (*Yes!*) Do we need to create a place which visibly proclaims that this Sacrament, this primary command of Jesus, *Forgive us our trespasses*, is observed? (*We might identify, sacramentally, this Sacrament with chair, stole, kneeling desk etc...*) The power of binding and loosing of sins is an essential aspect of Christ's Priesthood in which we share.

The Sorrowful Mother holds her wounded Son – and she holds us, as her children, in Him in our own woundedness. Can we read the world through sacramental eyes, or have we placed the Sacraments beyond our grasp? If we adore Christ in the Eucharist we will see Him in the broken bodies of our brothers and sisters (*cf. Frank, Bishop of Zanzibar: "If you are Christians then your Jesus is one and the same: Jesus on the Throne of his glory, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus received into your hearts in Communion, Jesus with you mystically as you pray, and Jesus enthroned in the hearts and bodies of his brothers and sisters up and down this country. And it is folly – it is madness – to suppose that you can worship Jesus in the Sacraments and Jesus on the Throne of glory, when you are sweating him in the souls and bodies of his children. It cannot be done."* Concluding Address to the Anglo-Catholic Congress 1923)

'The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness (88). ... the way to relate to others which truly heals instead of debilitating us, is a *mystical* fraternity, a contemplative fraternity. It is a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbour, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others just as their heavenly Father does. (92)' (Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium*)

Chapter headings from '*Seven Signs of the Times in the Light of Vatican II*' by Jean Vanier (to be published October 2017):

From humiliation to humility,  
From normalization to transformation;  
From exclusion to meeting;  
From power to authority;  
From isolation to community;  
From the secret to the mystery.

If God breaks us, He will sanctify the pieces that are fractured. (*A comment on a painting of Jacob wrestling with the Angel. 'Is it not a curious thing that whenever God means to make a man great, He always first breaks him in pieces? There was a man whom the Lord meant to make into a prince. How did He do it? Why, He met him one night and wrestled with him! You always hear about Jacob's wrestling. Well, I dare say he did, but it was not Jacob who was the principal wrestler — "There wrestled a man with Him until the breaking of the day." God touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and put it out of joint before He called him "Israel," that is, "a Prince of God." The wrestling was to take all his strength out of him and when his strength was gone, then God called him a prince.'* C. H. Spurgeon. 'David's Prayer in a Cave. Sermon 2282. 1890)

In a poem on Eucharistic living, S. Symeon the New Theologian (949 – 1022) wrote:

*We awaken in Christ's body  
as Christ awakens our bodies,  
and my poor hand is Christ, He enters  
my foot, and is infinitely me.*

*I move my hand, and wonderfully  
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him  
(for God is indivisibly  
whole, seamless in His Godhood).*

*I move my foot, and at once  
He appears like a flash of lightning.  
Do my words seem blasphemous? — Then  
open your heart to Him  
and let yourself receive the one  
who is opening to you so deeply.*

*For if we genuinely love Him,  
we wake up inside Christ's body  
where all our body, all over,  
every most hidden part of it,  
is realized in joy as Him,  
and He makes us, utterly, real,*

*and everything that is hurt, everything  
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,  
maimed, ugly, irreparably  
damaged, is in Him transformed  
and recognized as whole, as lovely,  
and radiant in His light*

*he awakens as the Beloved  
in every last part of our body.*