

Meditation August 23rd

I recently went away for a couple of days for a silent retreat. I had high hopes for the time away, thinking it would be a great time of listening to God, and getting various questions answered. In reality I found it hard work and quite a struggle to still my brain.

There were however several things that I came away with. Importantly, the essential need to just 'turn up' for meditation/time with God. This is regardless of whatever subjective feeling is going on, whether we 'feel' God's presence or not.

I was seeking rest, stillness and peace. While I was away I spent some time thinking about the story of Martha and Mary. I have a great deal of sympathy for Martha, after all the meal did need to be prepared and people had to eat. However, clearly she had got it wrong at that particular moment. The good thing she did was that she did not ignore her irritation, but told Jesus exactly how she felt. A Jesuit, William Barry, says that 'the more honest we are in expressing our feelings to God, the better God is able to communicate with us, and we with him.' So much better that she expressed her frustration than that she bottled it up. If she had not spoken, Jesus would not have been able to reply to her.

The difficult thing about the written word is that we cannot hear the tone of voice in which Jesus replied. Knowing that God is kind, I am sure that he would have spoken kindly, but without diluting what he was saying. His desire was that Martha, as well as Mary, should be able to be still before him. I like to think that this encounter could have been transformative for Martha, that she was able to 'hear' what Jesus said to her and begin to act on it.

Obviously we cannot spend all our time sitting still at Jesus' feet, life needs to be lived and things need to be organised. But perhaps I can learn to be less distracted and consumed by my 'to do' list and more focused on being still. One commentator on the passage says this, "In fact, we don't have to choose between Martha and Mary. Lots of ancient and medieval sermons and other writings presented the sisters as two halves of a whole with a mixed life —action based on contemplation, one not possible without the other —as ideal."

There is a led Ignatian audio meditation on this passage which you can find [here](#). It's worth listening to.

As I left my retreat, I was given a poem by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, which you may know . This is an encouragement just to 'keep on keeping on' in our walk with God and in our contemplative practice

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

