

Listening to the Voice

In June two of us visited a small Benedictine Community of Sisters. The long hazy days of summer were actually wet with gale force winds, and cold, but it was a good week. One day Sister Mary Michael said to us, "You must go and see Mount St Bernard," and then she added the words that decided us, "They have a good bookshop." She made it sound as if it was just up the road; not knowing Leicestershire ourselves, we believed her! Choosing one of the few fine days, we installed the satnav and set off. It seemed quite a long way and, in places, the traffic was heavy but eventually we found ourselves in Charnwood Forest. A country lane went in a straight line up a steep hill through woods and fields. A quick left turn and in front of us was the magnificent Cistercian Abbey.



However, on the way up the hill we had noticed a tea room! Naturally attracted to such places and, in this instance, having heard that there was a link with the Northumbrian Community as an added incentive, we hurried there just before it closed. We heard a remarkable tale of God's leading and those who had the courage to follow. It was a story so similar to our own that we felt an immediate bond with them. One of the founders, Kevin, sat down beside us, as we ate our scones and supped our tea. It was obvious what was happening around us, it was a meeting place, somewhere where broken lives were mended by the Healer. Delicious meals were served for a reasonable price. In addition it hosts Monos, a charitable organisation that seeks to nurture a monastic spirit in everyday life, with a special emphasis on prayer. It sits well beside the great Abbey. The Abbot has encouraged them, not having the monks available to provide a tearoom in the monastery grounds.

Way back in 1988, Kevin and his wife, Ellen, had an inward word from the Lord that one day they would develop a centre in the Midlands, "Where people could rest and find themselves - a barrier-less place where all were welcome." Sometime later they moved into a house in Charnwood Forest still unsure where the Lord was leading them. One day Ellen felt that she should bake some scones and place them outside their gate. It was a God thought, as a

friend of ours would have called it. She acted on it. Soon they had passers-by knocking on the door asking politely if they had any butter and jam to put on the scones! They acquiesced and not long after, someone said, "Could we possibly have a pot of tea?" It was at that point, that they decided to erect a gazebo on the lawn, place two tables with chairs under its awning, and serve scones and tea. There were problems, not least that their house was up a long drive, like a farm track. There was a long reverse down a rough lane with a bend in it. Not every driver was up to that, so now in addition to scones, butter, jams and pots of tea, Kevin found himself reversing numerous cars back to the road. It must have come as a sense of relief when a house nearby with easy access became available to rent. At the same time, it was a big step of faith. They took it and God has blessed their obedience.

Kevin was very keen to show us his chapel. We followed him to his house where we met Ellen. They took us through long grass, bright with dandelion, buttercup and clover, past what looked like old farm buildings, although they assured us that one was an old coach house. We halted outside a stout, wooden door and then stepped down into a small chapel. It was beautiful and holy. The influence of Celtic Christianity was unmistakable. The four corners had little altars dedicated to the saints. One was dedicated to St Brendan and on the wall above it hung a coracle. He was an Irish monk in the 6th century who was a great traveller. It is difficult now to separate fact and legend but most scholars agree that he travelled hundreds, if not thousands, of miles in his coracle, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide his fragile boat.

Recently, we came across this prayer attributed to St Brendan.

"Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown.
Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with you.
Christ of the mysteries, I trust you to be stronger than each storm within me.
I will trust in the darkness and know that my times, even now, are in your hand.
Tune my spirit to the music of heaven, and somehow make my obedience count for you."

May we, like Kevin and Ellen and many others, join the blessed, who listen to the voice of God and obey him.