

September is Here!

July and August are months full of sunshine, long evenings and a holiday atmosphere. In our house and garden we have barbeques and a cream tea on the terrace. Many of our guests come for a break, more like a holiday than a retreat, although we still have some who come for quiet and prayer. The house and our timetable are able to accommodate both. The pace quickens, as there is a rapid turnover of visitors; a room no sooner vacated than someone else occupies it. In addition we have those who decide to call and see us, sometimes folk we haven't seen for years!

Then comes September and there is an instantaneous change. Those who visit want time with God. The church groups arrive, intent on their future programme, praying together and seeking guidance from the Lord. Our work changes also. It is the serious stuff for us too: Quiet Weekends and groups that we lead, annual accounts and report! We start to have a wary eye on Advent Retreats and Christmas and soon our lovely garden will be put to bed. The nights begin noticeably to darken. The contrast between August and September is tangible.

It is rather like that in church life, too. It is good for us to have a break but now the serious stuff begins. The Lord calls each of us to take up our part in bringing in his Kingdom. Some of us are called to the upfront jobs, some to leadership, perhaps in fear and trembling, but for most of us it is the hidden, simple tasks without which a church could not function. The Lord doesn't distinguish between one form of service and another but he does call us all to be workers in his vineyard.

St Paul writes of our work being tested, as to whether it is, 'Gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw'.¹ It is not the importance of the work we are called to do that matters but how we do it. St Paul urges Timothy, a worker in the early church, to aim to be, 'A workman who does not need to be ashamed.'² Self-pity and self-importance have a habit of creeping in. For instance in our guest house, it is one thing to be entertaining visitors and it is another to be tackling a mountain of washing up on your own, as one Sister discovered. It was only when the Lord whispered to her, 'Where I am, my servant also will be',³ that the place of humility became a meeting with Jesus.



Going for gold!

Last week a lady, who rang us, enquired whether we were the Sisters who had come to a certain church in Chester. It was a long time ago but we did remember. We had given out ice lolly sticks (no ice lollies!) and attached to them there were two words, 'No grumbling.' She still had hers and used it as a daily reminder. We lost ours, and sad to say, we can easily fall into grumbling! That is what St Paul would call building with straw. There are some things that we love doing but God sometimes calls us to tasks that we dislike and find difficult. That is the test. Do we do these with a smile for Jesus and build in gold, or mutter and groan, building in straw?

Johann Christoph Arnold quotes these words from Mother Teresa who epitomised Christlikeness as she went about her daily tasks.

'Speak as little as possible of oneself.

Mind your own business.

Avoid curiosity.

Do not want to manage other people's affairs.

Accept contradiction and correction cheerfully.

Pass over the mistakes of others.

Accept insults and injuries.

Accept being slighted, forgotten, and disliked.

Be kind and gentle even under provocation.
Do not seek to be specially loved and admired.
Never stand on one's dignity.
Choose always the hardest.⁴

¹ 1 Cor.3:12 NIV

² 2 Tim 2:15 NIV

³ John 12:26 NIV

⁴ 'Cries from the Heart'. Johann Christoph Arnold