

SISTERS OF JESUS WAY SPRING NEWSLETTER

Easter 07



Our dear friends,

We have planned three special weekends over the spring/summer period. Our Praise Weekend is one with which many of you will be familiar. We walk the paths of the Wirral or wander along the sandy beach pausing to praise the Creator. Only those who are reasonably fit and able to join in the walks should book in.

One weekend will have an emphasis on quietness. It can be difficult to be silent and still. Yet it is often in the silence that we meet the Lord Jesus. We won't be completely quiet all weekend but intersperse what we hope will be helpful comment, sharing and music. "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."ⁱ He is our example.

For the first time in several years we are leading a weekend at Pentecost. Some of the Sisters can remember a time when the third Person of the Trinity was neglected. It was not unusual to hear him referred to as "it". Then came the charismatic renewal, which was like a breath of springtime breaking down barriers, creating worship that truly had a touch of heaven, introducing gifts that up until then had not played a part in ministry. Most of the many beautiful worship songs we have today have flowed from this time. We saw the "Acts of the Apostles" happening before our eyes.

We also saw, in places, this renewal begin to go badly wrong, gifts becoming soulish, a seeking after excitement and the supernatural rather than the Lord Jesus. The gospel for the world became the gospel for "me" and stopped there. Perhaps all of us who were there in those early, halcyon days must take some blame. We were slow to see the dangers. Leadership in some areas was lacking or not sufficiently firm. Teaching sometimes became so centred on the gifts that taking up the cross and holiness, that is, the fruits of the Holy Spirit took back seat.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples to empower them to take the good news of the Lord Jesus into all the world beginning with Jerusalem, the city that had crucified Jesus.ⁱⁱ Yes, there were signs and wonders but they followed after and were not an end in themselves.ⁱⁱⁱ There were healings as there are today but physical healing never became the centre as it sometimes has for us. A steady stream of people have come to us over the years confessing that they have in some way been made to feel second-class Christians because they have not been healed. We should all approach Pentecost with repentant hearts that we have grieved the Holy Spirit by our lack of love and reverence for Him.

The Holy Spirit is the beloved third Person of the Trinity. Through the gifting of the Lord Jesus, he indwells us and empowers us. His is the pure worship of Jesus in our hearts. His is the love that breaks our heart and from a broken heart pours out love in a needy, dark and sometimes tragic world. In our Pentecost Weekend we will be thanking the Lord Jesus for his wonderful grace in sending us his Holy Spirit and saying again, "Come, Holy Spirit." Of course you do not need to come to a special weekend to pray, "Come, Holy Spirit"! The infilling of the Holy Spirit is the birthright of every Christian.

We know that quite a number of our friends are facing or have recently faced difficult situations, so we thought in the remainder of this letter we would share some of the ways that the Lord has brought us through hard, difficult days. One of the first things we have had to learn is to let go of the "I can deal with this myself, cope, manage" or whatever other phrase we may use. It is surprising how often that is our fall back position! Most of us are very adept at saying "fine" when someone asks us how we are even when we are falling apart inside. Of course we are not suggesting that we pour out our hearts to all who ask us politely how we are. That would not be wise but we are suggesting that it is wise to be real with at least one or a few close friends.

Most of all we need to be real with the Lord. The gospel writers don't try to disguise the fact that the disciples were real people with faults, failings, fears and frailties. On the contrary we often try to hide behind the "I am fine, thank you" until we even begin to convince ourselves! Jesus often spoke of being childlike ^{iv} with all that means in accepting the love and comfort of the heavenly Father. "The Father himself loves you," ^v he said. Look for little signs of his love, however dark the path. They will be there, the kindness of a friend, the help of professionals, beautiful spring days and as St Paul says, don't forget to thank him – "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."^{vi}

The Lord Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”^{vii} We can remember one situation when we felt totally bereft and these words were in the Daily Light reading that day. It comforted, strengthened and encouraged us. Many times we have been given a word from Scripture that spoke exactly to our situation. His words are words we can trust, a sure rock on which we can stand however we feel. We don’t need to feel trusting in order to trust. Our feelings can go numb with grief, shock, exhaustion or pain. Because we can’t feel him doesn’t mean that God is not there. Jesus said, “I am with you always.”^{viii} That is the truth not our feelings.

But to trust we have to be real in another area, that of accepting the situation we are in. We can expend much energy trying to fight circumstances or rebelling against them. We see all the plans that we have for the future come tumbling down around us and we can’t face it or there is a sorrow that crushes us. In our Gethsemane service in our chapel on Maundy Thursday evening, the Sisters sang the heart-rending words of Jesus, “Take this cup from me”.^{ix} The singing rose almost piercing above the rhythmic beating of a small drum as his captors drew nearer. In his humanity Christ shrank from his imminent suffering. Jesus is not presented in the gospels as some plaster saint always with a fixed smile but a man in turmoil and agony. Yet he gave the Father his “yes”. “Not what I will, but what you will,”^x he prayed. The Father asks us also to give him our “yes”. “Yes Father, yes Father, yes.”^{xi}

There are pitfalls which stand in the way. “Why me” is a cul-de-sac leading nowhere except to self-pity. Much is said these days about anger and certainly if it is there, it is better to be out and recognised. Does there have to be anger? Of all the emotions that Jesus experienced in Gethsemane anger does not appear to be one of them. His example is the one that we would want to follow. In difficult situations we always want to blame someone but like the “why me” it is a dead end road. Our own wrong attitudes need to be renounced. We pay a high price if we insist on hugging self-pity, anger and resentment to ourselves and we also grieve the Lord Jesus.

Sometimes we try to make sense of a situation, to understand. The answer may be glaringly obvious; such as, it was a necessary humbling. But in other situations we can comprehend no meaning. Nothing makes sense anymore. All is darkness. Many have been helped by the plaque in our garden, “My Father, I do not understand you but I trust you.”^{xii} We may say it through tears but we trust.

When we look back over the years at some of the seemingly impossible situations we have been in, there has always been a way through but we didn’t see it when we were in the midst of trouble! It is always so. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will give the gift of faith as he has on several occasions when the way forward looked, and indeed was, humanly impossible. Other times the assurance of the gift of faith has not been there and we have simply hung on. The Lord has always brought us through.

We have not mentioned fear, and space is beginning to run out! Fears can crowd in as troubles escalate. Some of us are more fearful by nature than others. Fear can feed on imaginings and even the Lord will not give grace for something that hasn’t happened! As we all know, fear in response to a threatening situation, can be real and overwhelming. Jesus did not disguise his fear in Gethsemane. He doesn’t ask us to disguise it either or to try to overcome it in our own strength. When our dog is afraid we always know because he comes into the room at a brisk trot and promptly sits down on someone’s foot, refusing to move. In a similar way when afraid we have learned to run to the heavenly Father, the closer to him the better, and refused to move. “When I am afraid, I will trust in you.”^{xiii}

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”^{xiv}

Sisters of Jesus Way

i Luke 5:16

ii Acts 1:8

iii Acts 4:30, Acts 14:3

iv Matt.18:2,4.

v John 16:27

vi Eph.5:20

vii John 14:18

viii Matthew 28:20

ix Mark 14:36

x Mark 14:36

xi Francis de Sales

xii Mother Basilea Schlink Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary.
xiii Psalm 56:3
xiv 2 Cor. 1:3-4

We are registered with the Charity Commissioners
