

Dear all

As I sit down to write this email, the weather is not looking good and, although it is early in the morning, I can't look forward to a lovely long walk in the sunshine (something that has been setting me up for each day of the lockdown and helping me through the difficult moments).

What I would like to do with these emails is take you with me on another thing that helps me through – and that is Ignatian spirituality. I suspect that many of you know of this, but for those who don't, it is rooted in the experience of St Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuits. You can Google this easily and read all about it online, so I am not going to give you chapter and verse (but if you would like more background, do email me and let me know).

When we meet with God in prayer, we are all used to praying in church services, with someone offering us pointers for prayer and giving us time to offer up our own thoughts and experiences to God – leading intercessions.

My experience of Ignatian spirituality focuses on preparation for prayer – on the idea that God is with us *all* the time, but we are not always with God. Our task then is to still our busy thoughts and our busy bodies and to recognise that we need to ask God for help. I do this mainly through a breathing exercise – I breathe in for 2 counts and out for 2 counts (using the word 'Maranatha' – Come Lord. Two syllables to breathe in, and two to breathe out).

The humility that is required to remember that we are asking for help because we are unable to achieve things on our own, is a central part to my prayertime. Once we have done this, we are truly in the presence of God – because God was there all the time. We don't have to shout and make a loud noise. We don't even have to use words. We simply have to be, to be in the presence of God.

On days when I feel rushed, or anxious, or too pre-occupied to take on the prescribed Church of England Morning Prayer, I use Sacred Space first. It is a gentle walk into calming me down and preparing me for opening myself up to the presence of God. You can google this – sacredspace.ie – if you wish to find out more for yourself.

Ann Lewin (poet, retreat leader) wrote:

'Pause at the threshold
Of the sacred space.
Bow low.
Prepare for fresh encounter
with the Holy One.'

I leave you to think about that as you approach your quiet moments with God today. Meanwhile, please take Simon to God in prayer during this month, stay safe and happy, and remember that I am here and happy to chat if you wish to! There will be Zoom Coffee Mornings (see website for details) – open to anyone who wishes to join me – just to catch up with one another and see some friendly faces.

Every blessing

Linda