



OWITF Reflections

Reflection Letter 6, August 2015
CELIBACY

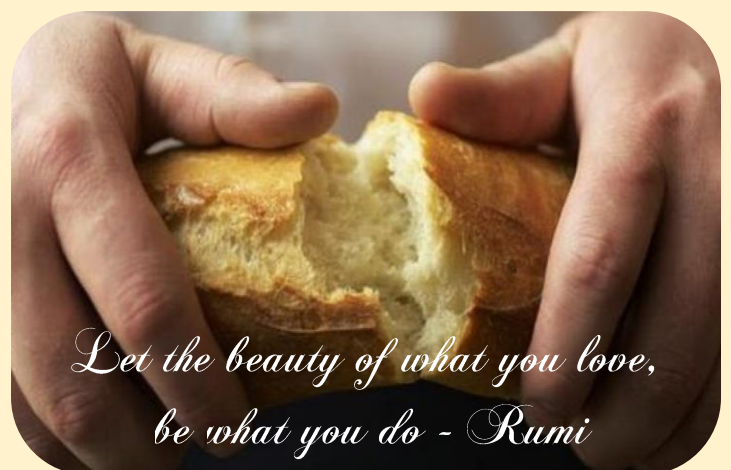
Our past two reflection letters have been dealing with the first two 'C's in the booklet *Our Way into the Future*. So far we have offered reflections on Community and Consciousness. This month's offering offers some thoughts on Celibacy.

Celibacy in the 21st century! Has it any relevance at all? What does it mean? Talking about the vows in general, Diarmuid O'Murchu feels that "The vows are a well-known feature of Religious Life, yet one of the most poorly understood aspects...For the general public, our vows are perceived mainly in terms of the sacrifice Religious make in order to be devoted more fully to the things of God".

Barbara Fiand has this to say in her book *Wrestling with God*: "Instead of living our celibacy we have probably avoided it. Hence we have difficulty truly experiencing the presence of God and the life force in creation". She goes on to say 'For some religious, the invitation to encounter their own sexuality, to work with sexual feelings and urges rather than against them seems relatively a new idea but also an unnerving proposition. We play it safe, we are polite, even friendly but distant. We may have many friends but none too close to hurt us. Our passions hidden and denied, intimacy treated with suspicion'.

Religious today are called to live the values our societies are in danger of losing, and to do this in a way that is radical. The vows we profess are primarily about values. The value behind our vow of celibacy is love. It's all about love. Jesus loved radically, wastefully, and freely both in his personal life and in his ministry. Do I radiate this love? Do our communities radiate this love?

I then wonder what loving looks like in the context of a community. How do I show love to the brother I live with? There are many ways we can show love in community. One is when we practise affirmation, acknowledging what others are doing, expressing gratitude for favours offered, and noticing the successes that others achieve. Another is when we practise listening to the spoken and unspoken hopes and fears of others, and being prepared to manage moments of conflict and disagreement. A third is when



*Let the beauty of what you love,
be what you do - Rumi*

*To love at all is to be vulnerable.
Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung
and possibly broken.
If you want to make sure of keeping it intact,
you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal.
Wrap it carefully around with hobbies
and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements.
Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.
But in that casket- safe, dark, motionless, airless
– it will change. It will not be broken.
It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable...
The only place outside heaven where you can be
perfectly safe from all the dangers
and perturbations of love is hell.
C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves**



we decide to approach rather than withdraw when we feel misunderstood, hurt, or ridiculed. Often we are inclined towards fight, flight or freezing as we encounter difficulty. The challenge is instead to face the challenge and seek to mend the broken connections. This is not easy, but as Mary Oliver says, “There are a hundred paths through the world that are easier than loving, but who wants easier?”

Love is the energy at the heart of the universe and like all energy it can be wonderful, beautiful and life-giving, and we also know that it can cause death and destruction. There are those who say ‘Don’t touch; it is way too dangerous. So how are we to engage with this energy in a way that will nourish us and not destroy us? This is a question that all humans, religious included, have to answer.

Ronald Rolheiser (*The Holy Longing*) says that it all comes down to the question: How healthy is your soul? To put it in another way, what do you do to nourish your soul? We nourish our bodies with a rich varied diet on a daily basis. Do we do the same for the deeper self? Or do we feed it ‘junk food’? Our societies today suffer from a sickness of soul and try to deal with this with a diet of consumerism, filling up the emptiness with lots of stuff and addictions.

Sue Monk Kidd in her beautiful book *When the Heart Waits* has some suggestions for us: she says that soul is primarily nourished by contemplation, mindfulness and times of silence. Can we build this into our daily routine? She also recommends activities like journaling, gardening and nature walks. If that deepest part of you - your soul - is healthy you will be able to love well.

The energy that calls us to spend time in prayer and contemplation and the energy that prods us to phone a friend to invite him or her to coffee both come from the same source. Both experiences nourish our souls and create in us a sense of deep connection.

As humans we are people not at ease. We are restless, seeking, aching for the more. We come into this world seeking to be reunited to that Whole from which we have come. In the words of Augustine, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God”. It is this desire for connection that will ensure that we will continue to harness the energies of love throughout our lives until we are finally reconnected with the One who satisfies all our longings.