

PENTECOST 11 All Souls' 2025 **BECOMING OUR TRUE SELVES** dtw

Jeremiah 1. 5

Before you were in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit movement, wrote *There are very few people who realise what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into his hands, and let themselves be formed by his grace.*

When I lead or go on a directed Retreat at the Ignatian Retreat House at Sevenhill near Clare, it is a time to lose yourself and to find Christ; to put away, as much as possible, human and worldly preoccupations to focus on the one thing that is needful: the presence of Christ. The time, usually from Monday night to Friday morning, is lived out in silence, only broken by liturgies in the chapel and one-on-one direction for up to 40 minutes each day with a Spiritual Director and reflective music at meal times. Fr Michael McCaffrey and I will share the leading of a slightly shorter Retreat at Sevenhill next year for the Order of St Lazarus

In the notes participants are given at the beginning of the Retreat, we are encouraged to 'disengage' because we recognise that humans are rhythmic creatures, needing activity *and* rest, engagement *and* disengagement. It is an intentional opportunity to quieten oneself, to centre oneself, to choose 'the good portion' as Jesus observes of Mary the sister of Martha in that familiar domestic scene of Luke 10. It is a time of confidence, trust and deep listening; a time to keep in harmony with the movement of God in one's life. One can finally emerge from such an experience having sorted out some of our wheat from the chaff and with a clearer focus on one's priorities in life. The real test is how long the focus lasts back in what is loosely described as 'the real world' or the 'coal-face of life'. I recommend a retreat to all serious Christians - a great time for a 'spiritual stock-take' and a 're-boot'.

I will remind you of the words of Ignatius: 'There are very few people who realise what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into his hands, and let themselves be formed by his grace'. We are all made in the image of God and the greatest task that every human being has in life is to *image God*. No other task or challenge comes close. Paul says 'be imitators of God as beloved children'. (Eph 5.1) Jesus came and showed us how. He is the incarnation of God. He is the perfect image of God and also *perfectly images* God. If you want to image God all you have to do is become as Christ-like as you can. You do that by losing yourself in Christ, so

that it is no longer you who live, as Paul observed, but Christ who lives in you. Now, this is not as hard as you think. It is really a matter of owning that God became what you are that you might become more like God and therefore, more wonderfully human (rather than 'only human' which many people say when they goof up!)

Thomas Merton, arguably the greatest monastic mystic of the twentieth century, wrote *It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realisation should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake. I have the immense joy of being a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realise what we all are. And if only everybody could realise this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining in the sun. It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of the reality, the person each one is in God's eyes. If only we could see each other that way all the time.*

Today, in the readings from Jeremiah and Luke, we encounter two people who became their true selves in their encounter with Divine Love. Jeremiah became a powerful prophet because he let himself be used by God as an instrument for something that had to be said. His original excuse was that he was 'only a boy', but God touched his mouth, put words in his mouth and the rest was salvation history. A woman, crippled and bent over for 18 years, written off by her society, is set free by Jesus. Jesus brings out of this woman the real creation that God had always seen in her. In abandoning ourselves to God, liberation and fullness of life are possible for everyone. Why? Because each one of us is carved in the palm of God's hand; fearfully and wonderfully made. God has only one request of us: will we image God's love for the world to see? May each of us be formed by God's grace all the days of our life. You see, God is the *real* Spiritual Director. Like Jeremiah and that woman, we are simply called to let go and let God operate in our lives. And then we too can be a small part of salvation history in this little corner of God's earth.