

Places of Peace and Retreat

Ours is a noisy and a busy world. Even in this church, which is very much an oasis in our city centre, one cannot get away completely from the sounds of day to day life. Indeed what we do in church, praying and worshipping God, is by definition inextricably related to what we do outside in our daily living. The two aspects of our lives cannot be separated.

If only to remain sane and balanced we need, though, to have times away from our normal tasks – times of quiet to think and contemplate, times of quiet for mental and spiritual refreshment.

Even our Lord needed such quiet times to pray on his own. There are a number of references to that in the Gospels, such as that we heard just now in our Bible reading (Luke 6.12-17). If Jesus needed times like that we do so even more.

Certain places do lend themselves more to prayer and contemplation, such as mountains and gardens. Somehow nature can make us more conducive to withdrawing from the cares and issues of modern life. That is why retreat houses are so often in more remote and secluded locations.

Such times are, however, only a temporary retreat from daily life. They are not so much an escape as a means of equipping ourselves better to face the challenges and tasks in our daily lives. They are opportunities to recharge our spiritual batteries, to help us come closer to God. We see that in our Bible reading where our Lord's time alone is followed by practical action, in this case bringing together a group of disciples to share in his ministry.

Sadly many people in our world today do not have the option of enjoying places of quiet retreat. Where there is war and conflict there may simply be no such oases of quiet and peace. Where the need is greatest the opportunities may well not be there.

I imagine it is very difficult for us to imagine living in areas of conflict, with a daily fear of violence, not knowing what each day will bring. To the normal noise of daily life is added the noise of bombs and of guns, the noise of people crying out in pain.

True and lasting peace is an aspiration of so very many people throughout the world, an aspiration that may be deadened by resignation and despair. We pray that they may keep that hope alive, and that those in positions of power and authority may work to make that peace a reality. That must remain our constant prayer to God, the God of justice, compassion and love.

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