

Recently I read a beautiful article by Fr. Daniel O’Leary in which he describes a celebration of the blessing of the sick in his parish. He and his team decided to ask the sick people to bless them: “With an unaffected elegance the ill, the elderly, leant forward from their seats and wheel-chairs and graciously and smilingly placed their hands on our heads and shoulders, murmuring words of healing and comfort. It was as though they were only waiting to be asked, as though this was something they had always wished to do.” He concludes, “There was an unforgettable atmosphere of the divine presence when we, the so called able-bodied, knelt for the healing touch of those we were serving.” (1)

Reading this I was struck with a sense of *deja vu*. Last week at my Spred session, I had been working with a young woman with cerebral palsy whose arms often jumped uncontrollably. She had enjoyed painting with sponges as a result of which we were both covered in paint. I brought over a bowl of warm water and soap. Afterwards I reached over to get some hand cream but Laura intercepted me and with great difficulty squeezed the cream onto my hand, and proceeded to rub it with vigor and delight not only on my hands, but my arms up to the elbows! I was aware of the reversal of roles and of something deep inside me being awakened. I felt stillness in my body and the genuine delight of the experience radiating from my face. I was being blessed by someone who was a sacrament of blessing. I believe the *beauty* of the action awakened the Divinity within me.

This event reminded me that there is mutuality in the friendships in Spred. We all give. We all receive.

In this newsletter I want to reflect on *beauty* as a means of communicating the presence of God-with-us at our Spred sessions. *Beauty* as the vehicle of catechesis, *beauty* as the mystery that enchants us.

John O’Donohue has written a book called “Mystery: The Invisible Embrace” and in it he states that beauty touches us in a way that draws us “deeper and deeper into mystery, into the beyond, into God.” That which is beautiful captures our complete attention because it resonates with the sense of the beyond in us. The beyond of God who constantly draws us towards that which is mystery, that for which our hearts and souls long.

Beauty carries us to a place of sheer delight, of joy, of peace and into union with God’s very self. God touches our heart and soul through beauty - flowers, trees, birds, shells, rainbows, stars and every single person we meet. All we have to do is to see, to hear, to touch and to be open

to God's revelation - for beauty is the revelation of the Divine - God revealing God's self to us in every created thing so that we might know God and be totally united with God.

Activity Catechists have endless opportunities of offering experiences of beauty to the community of faith in the choice of activities they present and the ambience created. Theirs is the responsibility of providing beautiful, appealing activities which will engage the community in awe, in wonder, in peace and which help ease each one into the added beauty of silence. Beautiful colors, beautiful textures, beautiful sounds, beautiful scents, carefully chosen and lovingly arranged around the preparation room, will beckon and challenge, and in time transform all of us. Activities should be alchemists of transformation. Lighting which is gentle on the eyes but adequate for vision will enhance the beauty of our special place. Gentle sounds of a harp or cello, violin or classical guitar will settle us in restful peace. Only an ambience of welcome and beauty, a pleasant, warm place which speaks of care and love can help us prepare well to listen with our hearts and enter into the mystery of the session.

It is hard work to prepare such an environment but when there is fire in the soul we support and carry one another as we consider the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the beauty of God-with-us. Our desire must be to create a haven of beauty and tranquility. As we welcome one another into this environment we remember that each welcome opens a door to God's Word and entices us into mystery - into the very heart of God.

In our Celebration Room we hope to experience the presence of this beautiful God in the sacredness of the environment, the reverence of the people, the enchanting gestures.

It is the privilege of the catechist to reveal the presence of God's
beauty already here in what is happening all around.

At the Evocation of the Human Experience the leader catechist uses the object to evoke memories from our own life experiences - events, where God has already been present. "The Ordinary" is the realm of grace: awareness of human experience is at the heart of God's self-disclosure. Hence leader catechists become the mid-wives of mystery, consecrating the ordinary, drawing out from its womb, the embodied presence of our wonderful God.

The astonishing beauty of the Good News is shared by the leader catechist not just in word but through facial expression, body language and intonation. This Word has the power to set us free "dance the dance within us, to sing the song of our souls and to listen to the whisper of our own hearts." In order to mediate this beauty, our hearts must first be on fire with love for God remembering that we do not bring God to people: we awaken the presence of God in them.

The catechist is inspired by the words of St. Augustine:

"Beauty, so ancient and so new.
You sent forth your beams and shone upon me.
I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you.
You touched me and I have burned for your peace."

The author Daniel O'Leary says that liturgy is the routine inscription of eternity in time: "in the



**EVER
ANCIENT**

liturgy, the ordinary is consecrated and made the place of encounter.” He goes on to say that we need to be aware of the intimacy of God in life experiences in order to experience the great intimacy of God in the Eucharist. This is an inspiring articulation of the intrinsic connection between liturgy and catechesis. Through our Spred sessions we are becoming more and more aware of God in our daily lives as we reflect, share, be still and celebrate. At our Spred Family Masses in the parish we experience in a special way the Beauty of God’s healing presence.

“Before he died, having exhausted what he could do with words, Jesus went beyond them. He gave us the Eucharist, his physical presence, his kiss, a ritual within which he holds us to his heart. Touch, not words, is what we often need.”

These words become flesh as we celebrate our Mass aiming for maximum participation, creating a focus as the Word of God is proclaimed in word and gesture and giving attention to those precious times of silence.”

Surely we are doing what Pope Benedict asked when he said, “If the church is to continue to transform and humanize the world, how can we dispense with beauty in her liturgies, that beauty which is so closely linked with love and with the radiance of the Resurrection.

The beauty that emerges from woundedness is a beauty infused with feelings, a beauty different from the beauty of landscapes. This is a beauty that has suffered. Not all woundedness succeeds in finding its way through to beauty but when it does a wonderful transformation takes place - compassion, born from one’s woundedness is one of the most beautiful presences a person can bring to the world. We see this beauty in Jesus on the cross. We see it in the parents, the friends and the catechists with whom we journey in faith.

The writer Robert Bausch captures something of God’s revealed beauty in his poem, “What do we know of God?:

I can say nothing of God except that I saw the red flame of a cardinal
against the snow this morning.

I can say nothing of God except the warm smell of potato soup and the sharp tang of cheddar
cheese shimmies up my nose when a friend made lunch for me.

I can say nothing of God except that in the afternoon I washed my face in a cold mountain stream
and it stung my skin and left me feeling fresh and clean.

I can say nothing of God except that two nights ago a cricket sang a funny song in my closet
amidst the socks and silence.

I can say nothing of God except that the rough texture of grainy bread on my tongue
and the sweet, liquid acid of grape in my throat are a
bittersweet memory of compassion and taste of heaven.

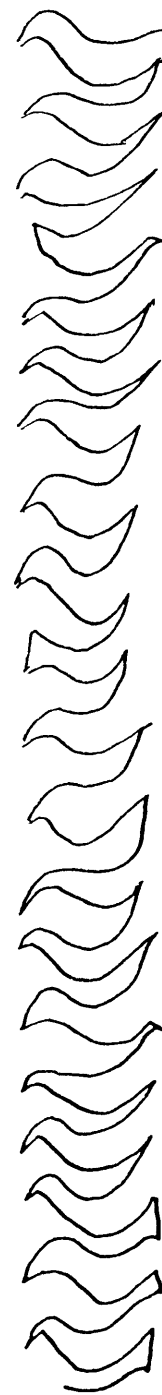
I can say nothing of God except that stones can speak and deer fly in my dreams,
that a strange child smiled at me in the supermarket
and that each blade of green grass wears a locket with God’s face inside,
and that on every hair on my cat’s face is written, “alleluia.”

Sr. Agnes Nelson SND
Spred Director, Glasgow Scotland

(1) The Tablet, October 18, 2008

Other quotations from:

Begin with the heart: Recovering a Sacramental Vision. by Daniel O’Leary



**EVER
NEW**