

At present I am very conscious of the word **IN**.

Having moved house, I have had to be specially watchful for **IN** signs as I find my way around a new environment. A very small word, it has enormous implications for safety, information, and even self-respect. One looks silly trying to enter by way of the exit.

Following the signs for the **way in** brings us to a destination, a designated purpose, an encounter with someone who may know how to help us. As a child I lived in a Glasgow tenement, so no-one had a garden or a front door, and communication between playing children and their parents was generally conducted from the window, including what we all referred to as “getting called in”. But - every mother in the street when faced with defiant or unacceptable behaviour, would appear at street level, where she knew how to utter this one little word in tones of such threatening severity that immediate and total obedience was our only possible response.

“**IN**” There was no room for manoeuvre - **IN** we went.

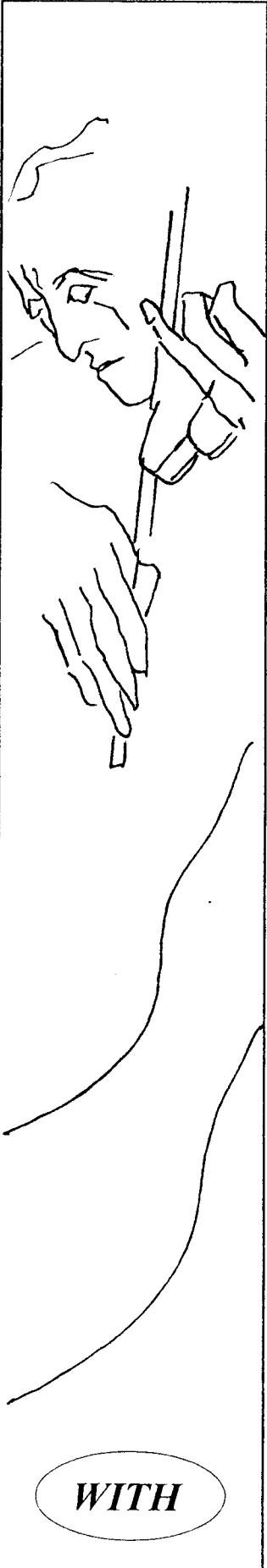
Following this order brought us back to the confines of the family, not just “under the family roof”, or “in the house”, but into the fold of the family’s mutual existence. There we may have been scolded or corrected, but parents call their children in so that they can be fed, washed, rested, and sleep in comfort and safety to prepare for tomorrow’s growth. In a family circle everyone shares in the forward flowing life movement, everyone is united. Coming in to our family circle is an enfolding experience.

Within has a deeper significance than the simple word **in**.

WITH = united, **IN** = enfolded. **WITH - IN OR WITH/IN** implies a depth of shared existence, a depth of protection, a depth of affection. It gives a nuance of sheltering love, but also of shared participation, shared responsibility.

The Church family to which we belong has these same nuances, these same implications. Going to church should not just be “attending”, simply going through the doors, being enclosed by the walls. Our entry into the building is symbolic because it indicates our willingness to belong, to participate. The family of God gathers together to form a union of hearts and minds, to draw each member **WITHIN** its folds. We are called to be there so that we might be nourished, cleansed, restored, refreshed. “Home from home.”

Every Mass in which we participate draws us more deeply into the enfolding grace which God is continually bestowing. Every Mass calls us to be active participants in forwarding the growth



of God's kingdom, taking some part in Christ's mission to make us all one in God's love. Coming out from each Mass should see us refreshed and rested, prepared to take a few more steps along the way that leads to God. The Church in her wisdom takes note of our growth and progress, and marks the deepening of our life WITH/IN the life of Christ, WITH-IN the folds of God's loving care, by offering the Sacraments to emphasise what is actually happening to us. We are "called in" through Baptism, nourished and communicated with in the Eucharist, cleansed and corrected in Reconciliation, strengthened and enlightened through Confirmation, healed or comforted in the Sacrament of the Sick, sent forth in peace through the Sacraments we received at the last, given special and necessary responsibilities for this Family's welfare if we are amongst those chosen for Ordination, invited to form a new nucleus of love and care for each other if we are called to Marriage, and married people may also be called to give life to new members, to continue the growth of God's family.

Each Sacrament is a deeper enfolding WITHIN the family of God, enriching lives in way of which we are not always aware, yet can recognise within the heart and spirit. We can feel it.

A Spred session is also a "calling in". It sits comfortably between the intimacy of the family circle and the openness of the Church community. It echoes one and evokes the other. It forms a bridge or stepping stone between them, strengthening the links. The similarities are obvious. Welcomed at the entrance, we are invited to come in and join our group, not simply to enter the building. Called by name and accepted as a person of worth, we are drawn into an enfolding silence and calm. This is not just entering a room, but moving into a different level of life. The preparation room, or space, is not simply an area in which "we" want "you" to be quiet but a place where our shared silences have become almost tangible; a place each of us enters with silence of mind and stillness of soul. This is a sacred place -even for- or especially for the Catechists' Preparation Session. Yet, in this particular space we are surrounded by an assortment of things which we are not accustomed to considering as sacred. (Just like home.) The Spirit WITH-IN us is active, and can now find the space to awaken our inner selves, preparing us for a sacred encounter.

The invitation to participate in this encounter is enacted when we move to our sacred space, the place where we celebrate God-with-us. Here we lift the ordinary, the domestic, the mundane onto a different sphere. In the catechists' session, new catechists often find this strange. In a sacred place it seems "unholy" to speak about shops and buses, holidays or cleaning, helping or worrying; yet these are the very "stuff of life" and in all of these God is with us.

God dwells WITH/IN us all the time so we bring the ordinary and the homely with us when we approach the Lord. The Spred session gives us a unique opportunity to do so.

Because we see ourselves united with each other in our ordinariness, and united with each other WITH-IN the enfolding love of God, we are able to rejoice with each other at the table. Eating together, drinking together, listening, communicating something about daily life and ordinary happenings. Before leaving we participate in a closing ritual by which we are sent forth, in peace and calm, refreshed and ready for another day WITH/IN the family, the world around us and the Church.

We go home. Our return should find us changed for the better, though it may be scarcely noticeable, even to ourselves, but it is a change nonetheless. The poet Robert Frost writes;

WITH

“They would not find me changed from him they knew,
Only more sure of all I thought was true.”

Over the years I have heard the families of our friends testify to this change, and many catechists have noted it too, a subtle deepening of awareness, a refreshment drawn from the silence and simplicity of the experience.

Each Spred session deepens and enhances the quality of our presence in the Church, too.

Coming back into the community of God’s people in the days which follow our Spred session, we have a new awareness of our belonging, of being enfolded by the faith community surrounding us. The differences may be barely perceptible, but the heart is more awake. The quality of our presence has a stronger resonance.

We listen with a different ear, for we have heard the word of God and the prayers of the Mass in a new connection with our daily lives; we have seen our mundane moments in the light of the Scriptures; we have found that our ordinariness relates to the words and actions we use in our worship of God.

Daniel O’Leary, Begin with the Heart, writes:

“At the Eucharist we celebrate the hidden presence of God in all our experiences...As with the Apostles after the Resurrection, something prevents us from recognising the presence of Christ everywhere and in everyone.”

When we are engrossed in a Spred session, one fractional layer of that “something” is lifted. Perhaps it is because we have shared the encounter with people who “see with the heart” more clearly than the rest of us.

We undertake our weekly commitment in order to enable these friends of ours to participate more meaningfully and more purposefully in the life of the Church, but our time spent WITH them draws us IN more deeply ourselves.

They “call us in”. Within the fold of their relationship with God, we find our eyes opened, just a little more, to the reality of God’s presence with-in our ordinariness.

Together with them we move more deeply into the mystery.

Together with them we receive nourishment, restoration, peace, joy.

Together we all become more aware of the constant companionship of Christ, who “calls us in” to the enfolding love of the Father.

Together with family, friends and the Church community, we acknowledge that it is
through him

WITH him,

IN him that our daily lives can give glory to God.

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