

# GREETINGS IN THE RISEN LORD



## FROM THE MONKS AT Holy CROSS PRIORY

### *The Priory: Sacred Space for the Non-affiliated*

In his new book *SILENCE: A Christian History*, Diarmaid MacCulloch comments that “The dilemma of how to use a sacred place in crowd or solitude has remained in Christianity...” (p. 68). The dilemma for many of us who have no parish affiliation is whether or not a sacred place is necessary at all. Where would we find a sacred place to worship God or to express our religious faith? How do we create sacred space and do we do it as a solitary or group activity? Do we need to belong to a parish? Is parish affiliation rooted in a particular space or with a particular group of people or both?

I am writing this in the season of Lent, a time when we focus on individual life and take stock of our inner spirituality before the great feast of Easter when most Christians come together in groups to celebrate the joy of the Resurrection. It is a time that balances the need for private space with group celebration. But where do we find these spaces in our individual lives? One of the places I find it is at Holy Cross Priory.

I love the sacred space at the Holy Cross Priory. The chapel simply emerges from the living space, set apart but not apart, a comfortable reminder of God’s presence in the midst of every-day life. For those of us who are privileged to live close enough to visit the Priory, praying with the Brothers provides opportunity to find that balance. The convent of the Sisters of St. John the Divine with their wonderful Guest House is another place to experience this integration, but in a larger group.

For others, the Parish Church is the main focus of their sacred experience, whether they are brought together as a neighbourhood community, or as worshippers from a particular culture, or for the particular type of music or liturgy, or possibly for the Outreach endeavours. For each Christian, the space integrates his or her ordinary life with the divine.

But what of those of us with no Parish affiliation and no particulars ties? Should we just be floaters, spreading our presence across the various parishes of the city? (In less than an hour I can be out the front door and into a pew of almost 2 dozen Anglican Churches.) Should we just say, “I’ll take the shortest walking distance, whatever”? At this point in my life I have more questions than answers. Nonetheless, in approaching Easter, until I have more answers, I can open myself to God’s guidance and spend some of my time with the Brothers at Holy Cross Priory.

BONNIE BELL, A/OHC

## Tante Carmen and Stories for Children

One of the special joys of life is extraordinary people, especially when they're relatives. My grandfather's sister, Tante Carmen, was a kind of Gallic version of Auntie Mame (as played by Angela Lansbury)! She had quite a life: born in Nice, married in Montreal, a Canadian citizen, she and Uncle Eugène moved back to Nice and spent the 30's living there in high style. When the Nazis came they interned Uncle Eugène as a Canadian, and Tante Carmen had to sell most of their property just to keep him alive. After the War they returned to Canada and lived as civil servants in Victoria until they retired. Then they returned to Nice.



During the six years that I lived in Europe, I naturally visited them often. On one of these visits after Uncle Eugène died and I had been ordained priest, Tante Carmen's thoughts turned to religion. As her thoughts on this, as on most other subjects, were definite, idiosyncratic, and forcefully expressed, I was not long left in doubt as to her opinion of what I had done.

First, she made it perfectly clear that she was a Christian. "*Je suis catholique*", she said, "that's my religion!" "*J'ai été élevée par les sœurs*" (convents must have been very flexible in those days); but as for me, her nephew: "*Mais un homme tout grand comme toi...*" "But a grown man, like you; how can you believe all these stories for children!" Then she closed the discussion with a final, "*Je suis catholique*"!

Lest you think this attitude is confined to free thinking French ladies, one of my fellow students in England (now, I see, Regius Professor of Cosmology) told me he was a staunch atheist; nevertheless, he assured me, he was a strong supporter of the Church of England!

Now Tante Carmen was extraordinary in many ways, and my friend was probably indulging in the ancient game of "needling the priest", but the idea that it's possible to uncouple Christian identity from a personal search for truth is a common one. Tata's search for truth was persistent, life-long, and (occasionally) very strange; but it was also almost completely divorced from the Mediterranean Catholicism of her youth. She remained institutionally committed, but her spiritual life lay elsewhere.

Anglicans can relate. During the last century and a half, it has become common for people to separate their occasional participation in Church life from their search for meaning and truth. Tante Carmen searched for truth earnestly all her life, and never abandoned her institutional connection, but the Christian Gospel remained for her merely "*histoires pour les enfants*": "stories for children". Yet why do we tell such stories? It is because they awaken in children and adults alike our deepest longings. Most are fiction. The message of Easter is that once—once—in the world's past (as opposed to its future), one of them was not. Easter is *une histoire pour les enfants* that happened. That is why it is Good News. Tante Carmen was looking for Good News—why could she not find it in the people and places that claimed to offer it to her? Good question.

"Those who live in glass houses should not cast stones", so it makes no sense to point fingers at the French Church before the First World War. The same disconnect is all too visible closer to home. With this difference: that unlike Tante Carmen, many modern Canadians cannot even *remember* being affiliated. They are looking for "sacred space", but not in the places where nearly twenty centuries of their ancestors have told them it was to be found.

The author of our first article reminds us that this is not always the case. When our fellow Canadians look at the Church, once so pervasive, now so alien, what do they see? Is it the Living Christ, alive, and strong, and well, with power to save? The message of Easter is: *the power is not ours, it is God's*. And, it belongs to affiliated and non-affiliated alike. When people look at the Church they need to see Him, not just us.

Tata's problem was not that she had doubts or questions; and certainly not that she was eager for truth. *Au contraire*. Of all the things essential to faith, doubt is the most necessary. For the purpose of doubt is that it be resolved, and of questions that they be answered. Not shunted aside, ignored, or denied, but—in God's good time—faced and answered.

I have no doubt that at this very moment Jesus is explaining all this to Tante Carmen (good luck!). When the unaffiliated look for Sacred Space, there has to be a place they can find it. Easter, after all, is not *just* a story for children!

RICHARD PAUL VAGGIONE, OHC

## The Art of Spiritual Direction

[Br. Reginald is currently pursuing a certificate in spiritual direction at the Hayden Institute in Niagara Falls.]

When I began my studies, I thought of Spiritual Direction primarily as a practice/process—that is, that spiritual direction was primarily a process by which one person, the director, assisted the other, the directee by directing their spiritual journey so that they might get in touch with and find God. It was detached like a therapeutic relationship but not quite so. There was no psychic dysfunction as in a therapeutic process but rather an interior confusion as to where God was located within oneself. The director's job was to identify the confusion and provide some clear and concise way out of spiritual confusion and into spiritual "wellness".

While I've not turned my back on this process/practice, I find that by itself it doesn't get to the heart of what spiritual direction is, or what it moves us toward. The "art" dimension of spiritual direction suggests that spiritual direction is not about clearing things or clarifying issues (although these remain important), but spiritual direction in the most profound sense is an experience of providing a space, a location in which an individual discovers God through an intimate discovery of oneself.

Margaret Guenther, a well-known spiritual director, is most helpful in this discovery process. She talks about the spiritual direction event as a birthing event in which the director functions as a midwife. The midwife assists in bringing forth life and bringing forth life that will be healthy and meaningful. This means that spiritual direction is not about telling someone how to find God in three easy steps but rather help the interior fertile soil of wanting, desire and curiosity about God to grow so that the directee is able to become conscious and therefore whole. The director assists, by providing the water to the soil for growth, but the seed—that which is the potential for growth—has already been planted by God in that person.

There are three elements of spiritual direction that I will explore in this article. They are Discernment, Listening with the ear of the heart, and Consciousness and change.

The *Discernment Dimension* is about asking, "What does God want for my life at any given time?" This can only be answered by asking the question, "What more do I want in my life?" And further, by asking, "What is life affirming and enhancing for me?" The ability to ask and stay with these questions allows one to create the space and location of both faith and trust in God's unconditional love for us thus giving the directee permission to enter Liminal Space where they can wrestle with God, talk with God, argue with God, and explore with God the direction their life should take. This is the place where one begins to discover oneself and God. This is the place where the spiritual director can be most helpful. The director helps the directee to take the risk of moving to that place where they are comfortable within the presence of God. Midwifery becomes both the space and location for "birth"—for new life to emerge.



*Listening with the ear of the heart* is the way, the method of discernment. This moves a person beyond the notion of listening only to what they can hear or what they want to hear. This is a fundamental movement of giving up control and allowing God to be the centre of one's decision making. This represents a fundamental shift in our understanding of us as human beings with free will. This moves us beyond, "I do what I want because I want to do this." It is a fundamental acknowledgment of who you are and whose you are. An essential part of the midwifery process is to allow the directee to encounter both the relationship of dependence and interdependence with God. This is rough and challenging work. Again there are questions posed: "What does this shift tell us about God?" "How does this shift alter our relationships with other people, ourselves, and with God?"

The third dimension is *Consciousness and change*. I believe that consciousness and change emerge from the work of discernment and listening. The work of discernment and listening opens an individual up to all the dimensions of the self that can enable and sustain growth as a human being. The goal of this process is to produce an individual who is fully alive—that means being fully conscious of one's gifts, one's emotions, and the impact of those gifts and emotions on oneself and others.

One of the results of this ongoing work is the integration of these insights into one's life. This requires a disciplined spiritual practice that integrates and incorporates discernment, prayer, service and listening into all dimensions of life. The spiritual director helps the directee to integrate these dimensions on a regular basis and holds the directee accountable for the integration. Slowly and almost imperceptibly one begins to experience change in one's life. It is my belief that the director's role is to hold up to the directee the notion that Discernment, Listening, and Consciousness are the trinity leading to wholeness and newness of life.

One of Holy Cross Priory's goals is to seek this integration for ourselves, and (with God's help) to make it available to others. Easter blessings!

REGINALD MARTIN CRENSHAW, OHC

## Community News

We have all been busy with our ministries over the last few months, and you can read some of the details in the Newsnotes included in this mailing. These Notes contain something about all of us, including our "Monks Not in Residence": Brothers who are formally associated with this House, but are not ordinarily resident here. Br. Leonard, who is "resident" is currently teaching in Ghana. He will be returning at the end of May. He would appreciate used Paschal Candles long enough to be sent to Ghanaian Churches that cannot afford them. *Finally, we ask you to remember us in your giving now and over the Summer—our expenses continue even when people are on vacation.*

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