

*This Reflection was written by Sister Abbie O'Sullivan for the January/February Far East magazine. I think it bears reading even though we are now in March! Sr. Maura*

## **Reflection**

We are now entering a New Year - 2021. It doesn't seem long ago since we entered a new millennium. How time has flown by. 'Tempus fugit' as the ancient philosophers proclaimed. How everything has changed during the past twenty years and how we have changed too. Such upheavals in our world and such an upheaval brought about by the pandemic!

More and more we realise our fragility and our ineptitude when it comes to getting rid of an unseen virus - an invisible force that brought untold suffering to the whole world. Our lives have changed - have been changed by an outside force which functioned freely throughout our world. For months it was a numbers game playing with our most cherished treasures - family and friends and imposing restrictions that affected our whole being. We were propelled into a 'new normal', an uncertain place where none of us felt at home. Our comfort zones were shattered and we were left wondering, questioning and trying to embrace the new reality of our lives. Did we learn anything?

In his book 'Jonathan Livingstone Seagull' Richard Bach wrote, "We teach best what we most need to learn." Jonathan Seagull learned well and look at the heights he soared to! His courage overcame his fear and he discovered abilities within himself that took him beyond his wildest dreams. He wondered why all the other seagulls couldn't find the same courage and freedom. Like him we too must delve into our own inner being and find there the abilities and energies that are lying dormant.

It has been traditional to make New Year's resolutions even though within the month of January they often fade away. Perhaps our normal vision is conditioned by the needs of our egos. But there is an alternative. Perhaps 2021 could be a year of personal prayer. How about a resolution to pray at all times. Prayer is never wasted. It always brings transformation as God is very near to us.

In his book 'Eternal Echoes' John O'Donohue says, "Real Prayer is the liberation of that inner voice of the Eternal." Let us be silent and listen. Prayer teaches us not to be uneasy or anxious because prayer is the activity of the soul in which the Eternal God is related to each one of us in a very unique way. Our soul is always at prayer whether we are aware of it or not because the Divine is always alive in us and sustains us. It makes us wonder at the awesomeness of a Loving Father who sent His own Son to teach us how to pray. His prayer was simply the 'Our Father'.

It was the ancient philosopher Plato who said, "All thought begins in wonder." Profound wonder can only be expressed in silence as words become redundant when we encounter the Divine who draws us out of ourselves. This enables us to appreciate the mystery of our own lives as wonder is the natural source of prayer. Prayer then, enables us to form a bridge between our longing for the Divine and our belonging to a higher Being.

So, let us allow WONDER to waken our soul. Wonder...Wonder...Wonder. Every person we meet, everything we encounter, every puff of wind that caresses us, every drop of rain that sprinkles us, light and darkness and everything else calls us to more vibrancy and enables us to respond to the wonder of our universe. The wonder of my being responds to the psalmist when he says:

***"It was You who created my inmost self***

***Knit me together in my mother's womb***

***For so many marvels I thank You.***

***A wonder am I***

***And all Your works are wonderful." Psalm 138***



#### **HELPING OTHERS ALONG THE JOURNEY.**

**Fr Tim Mulroy SSC, writes about the 12-step programme and how it helped one priest overcome his gambling addiction and offered support to others seeking recovery.**

Every Saturday afternoon, Fr Paul drove off faithfully in the car by himself. For several years, all I knew was that he was heading to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting somewhere in the local town. He said nothing more about this weekly outing. However, after he suffered a fall that necessitated a prolonged period of hospitalisation, followed by an even longer period of rehabilitation, Fr Paul was no longer able to drive. This loss of independence resulted in a changed lifestyle, which prevented him attending his weekly Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

When I asked Fr Paul about this, he acknowledged that, since he had not gambled for more than thirty years, it didn't trouble him that he was not able to go to those Saturday meetings. Besides, he continued to stay in contact by phone with a few companions who were also recovering from the same addiction. However, after a brief pause, he added, "For many years I have seen my participation in those Saturday afternoon meetings not just as a benefit to myself, but also as a way to encourage others to begin or continue their recovery journey. I participate just like every other person, but I make no secret of the fact that I'm a Catholic priest. When some of the participants hear that for the first time, they are greatly surprised, but then they begin to realise that if this addiction can trap a Catholic priest then they ought not be ashamed to admit that it has also trapped them – and that can be the beginning of their journey towards recovery."

After hearing this, I told him, "I'm not available most Saturday afternoons, but whenever I am, I can drive you there." The result was that once every six weeks, I drove Fr Paul to the Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

The first time I drove him there, he had to direct me, as the entrance to the meeting room was through the backdoor of a large, old building, and there was no sign to indicate what was taking place inside. On our arrival, I asked him, "How would a newcomer know that there was a meeting taking place here today?" His response was simple, "If someone wants to attend, they'll find out!"

I had planned to take a nap in the car while Fr Paul attended the meeting and was surprised when he invited me to join him. "I'll introduce you. You will be an observer – don't say anything" was his advice. The meeting began with self-introductions, followed by a reading from a chapter of a booklet that describes aspects of the 12-step recovery programme. Afterwards, the participants were invited to share whatever they wished about their life. Later, words of mutual encouragement and support were freely offered. A few of the participants mentioned that they had been in contact by phone with another member who was unable to attend that day. The meeting concluded with refreshments.

During the years that followed, from time to time, I accompanied Fr Paul to his Saturday afternoon meeting. As I came to a deeper understanding of the importance of those meetings for Fr Paul and the other participants, I also came to a greater appreciation of the gifts that the 12-step programme could offer wider society. Those weekly meetings of Gamblers Anonymous faithfully follow a simple format that provides participants with a restful space where they can experience self-acceptance and mutual support.

In a world that has become weary from novelty and sensationalism, so many people are left yearning for such an oasis. Moreover, in contrast to the emphasis on personal accomplishment and self-promotion in our society, those meetings place importance on sharing one's vulnerability and fragility. For the participants, helping others along the journey of life is seen as an important means of helping oneself. Furthermore, in this era of mass advertising, the highly discreet approach of the 12-step programme is refreshing and effective - in many towns and cities, weekly miracles take place in basement rooms without any large banner hanging over the front door of the building.

One Saturday afternoon as we were returning from a meeting, Fr Paul broke the silence. "I have become a better person and a much better missionary priest thanks to my addiction. It has taught me a lot." In some small way I was able to grasp what he meant, thanks to the privilege of having accompanied him as an observer to several meetings. And how I wished that the world around us could also catch a glimpse of that blessing which Fr Paul and his companions in Gamblers Anonymous had shared with one another and with me!

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