



## Nazareth Letter May 2024

*This month our Nazareth Letter is written for us by **Mirjam Ngoy-Verhage**, Mirjam, as well as being a member of the Nazareth Community, works as the discipleship enabler for the Diocese of London.*

### **The Gift of Interruption**

Dear Friends,

After a full day at work, making my way to the school gates to pick up my children, cooking dinner and clearing the kitchen, I had nearly made it to the end of the day. Around 9.30pm, two of my three children fast asleep, my 9-year-old son comes to find me, jumping up and down, exclaiming how he just has too much energy to fall asleep. I had been looking forward to some peace and quiet; planning to spend time in silent prayer and reflection. Inside I am starting to feel slightly desperate with what seems to be a day of never-ending responsibilities, but I surprise myself when I ask my son to come and sit with me and join me in prayer. I invite him to light a candle and try out one of the prayer stools. So, there we are, one prayer stool next to the other, on our knees, quietly, in a dark room with the light of the candle flickering shadows on the walls.

In the quietness of this moment, my son shows me his hand and expresses how it has been hurting. I have a closer look and discover a red area with a splinter stuck inside the palm of his hand. It takes a bit of time, but eventually with the right tools we manage to remove it. The pain seems to ease straight away. My son doesn't enjoy the hard stool as much as I do, so soon ends up laying on the floor next to me, while we spend the next five minutes in silence and finish with a prayer. It only takes a short moment for him to find his way to bed and fall asleep peacefully.

This profound moment that happened a few months ago, has made me reflect on the interruptions that are part of our life and faith journey. Over the past years – especially since becoming a mother - I have been wrestling with how to find space for contemplative practice and integrate it in my day-to-day life. In the initial years of being a parent, sleepless nights and all, there simply seemed to be no time for the extensive bible studies and prayers I had been accustomed to in my teenage years. This experience gently forced me to redefine my spirituality and image of God. At that time, I found it very helpful to explore images of God as a mother,

and discovered how the caring and feeding I was involved in 24/7 could be seen as forms of prayer in themselves.

More recently, as the children are growing up, I have been eager to get back into a rhythm that includes more traditional forms of prayer and engagement with Scripture. But life has not necessarily become any more spacious; how might I find time to connect with God in what seems to be a full life, marked by constant interruptions?

While looking for a Bible passage to go with this theme of being interrupted, it dawned on me that the life of Jesus is not very different from our own: a constant stream of interruptions. He is always on the move, going somewhere and then being stopped. In fact, it is during those interruptions that most of his interactions seem to take place. This is when people find healing and their lives get turned around. The sentiment of interruptions being crucial to our journey of faith is echoed by Catholic Priest Henri Nouwen when he talks about how the interruptions to his everyday life, in his words, “have most revealed to me the divine mystery of which I am a part... All of these interruptions presented themselves as opportunities... invited me to look in a new way at my identity before God. Each interruption took something away from me; each interruption offered something new.”

Interruptions could be explained as the things that happen to us that we do not plan or that prevent us from getting where we think we need to be. My close friends and family will testify that I am often preoccupied with what is ‘happening next’ or what’s on my to-do list. It could be described as the gift of being organised and at times it has served me and those around me well. But the other side of this gift means that I can at times struggle to be present simply to what is in front of me.

Still, Christ in his love seems to always find ways to get to us and speak to us. The experience with my son made me reflect on the interruptions that I so often fight, and how they might become a gift rather than a distraction. Could I welcome them as an invitation to be present? Might I be able to find ways of integrating them into my walk of faith? To take this one step further, maybe I could even intentionally build in my own interruptions to help break up my full day of running from one thing to the next. Like simple punctuations to break up a constant stream of doing; creating intentional moments of interrupting my usual patterns to help connect to God and others and to find meaning.

The wise Etty Hillesum in ‘A Life Interrupted’ writes how ‘sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths, or the turning inwards in prayer for five short minutes.’ Punctuations in their literal meaning don’t change the words in the sentence but assign meaning to the sentence. Likewise in our lives, embedding punctuations relates to the things we are already doing but becoming more intentional or assigning a specific meaning to them. This might look like saying a short prayer while boiling the kettle, using our daily journeys as a moment of connecting to God, or integrating a simple reflection

as part of our bedtime routine. In the context of our Nazareth Rule of Life, it is punctuating our week with moments of shared silence, sacrament, sharing... Having a go at adding these intentional interruptions to our everyday helps build a posture or reflex that enables us to discover the gift of interruption.

Interruptions don't just have the potential to help us be more present, but also connect us to others. Over the past couple of years, I have found it deeply healing to discover ways of connecting with God that I can practice with others. It means my prayer doesn't always depend on my availability and good will but is carried by those around me too. The invitation within this is to look beyond my own issues, to open my eyes to the pain and splinters in the hands of those around me. And in each other's presence opportunities for healing will arise.

I would have never thought about introducing the practice of silent prayer to my children, but months after our prayer-stool moment, my son still comes to me regularly, requesting another shared time of prayer. We've created a simple ceremony, where he lights the candle and we listen to a short reflection. I sit on the prayer stool, while he will lay down under a blanket next to me. We spend five minutes in silence, after which he will say a short prayer and blow out the candle.

Having wrestled with creating a regular pattern to connect with God, it was the actual thing (or person in this instance) that I felt was getting in the way of being with God, the interruption, that became a way into being with God – and it is still blessing me to this day... (*Mirjam, London, 23/04/2024*)

### **Bible Passage (Mark 1:35-37)**

In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.'

### **Wonderings**

I wonder if an interruption has become for you a moment of revelation of 'the divine mystery of which we are part'

I wonder what children can teach us about faith and prayer

I wonder if you can remember a time when you prayed with someone else and being together was a way of being with God.

What is the punctuation embedded within your day that can become the prayer?