

Is Your Well Empty?

Manila, Philippines

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*By Sr Audrey fcJ,
first appeared in her blog [Surprising Grace](#).*

A week ago I dropped (with some difficulty) all my work and other preoccupations, and took a bus an hour and a half out of the city to a Jesuit retreat house, where some of us are now taking a course on spiritual accompaniment. The retreat house is a peaceful place, surrounded by fields and bordered by towering, shade-giving balate trees. There is even a flock of (cute but admittedly dirty) sheep that comes by to graze at certain times of the day!

I didn't quite expect how relieved and light I felt at being here, away from all the usual pressures and things cluttering up my mind. As I breathed in the atmosphere of the place I also came in touch with the deep longing for God in my heart that had been obscured by all these other things. I had felt for some time now in the grind of daily life like I was trying to draw water from an empty well, but was not quite aware of the strength of my desire to hear and talk about God and – perhaps most importantly – to experience God's love and presence again.

Do you ever feel that way? I would hazard a guess that most of us do feel a yearning for quiet spaces where we meet God despite – or in the midst of – the bustle of our lives.

And for those of us who are professed religious, perhaps it is a more pressing concern. I have been surprised in the last few months since beginning full-time ministry how much my work patterns and the anxieties I have about work are the same as they were before I entered the convent. Why has nothing seemed to change? And is there really anything different that I am invited to offer to the world as a professed religious?

Perhaps the yearning I have felt this week offers an answer. And it is that the ministry that I do must arise from a deep connection to God – an awareness of God and a love for God. The “doing” is never an end in itself, nor the most important thing.

At the end of John's gospel lies one of my favourite scripture passages (John 21: 1-17). Peter the apostle, confused after all the events that have happened surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection, goes back to fishing and has no success even though he has left his nets out all night. In the early morning a stranger calls out to him and his companions from the shore – showing them where the catch of fish is – and Peter realises that it is Jesus. In his excitement he jumps off the side of the boat, and swims to meet and embrace Jesus his friend. Later, as the two sit by the seashore, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter assents. And then Jesus says, “Tend my sheep.”

“ I have always been attracted to this passage for the tender love and friendship that it shows between Jesus and Peter – and a glimpse of that same tenderness in my own relationship with the divine. Today it also reminds me – in the catch of fish that comes only with Jesus’ direction – that fruitfulness in ministry is God’s work, not mine.

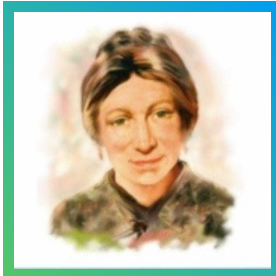
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This should be cause for greatly reduced anxiety!

But more importantly, as someone pointed out to me recently, the sequence of their last conversation is quite significant. Jesus asks first, “Do you love me?” before he goes on to say, “Tend my sheep.” Those of us who hear God’s call to us today may learn from this that the core of our ministry is not good works – it is first being in love with God. It is this love that connects us with the Source of all good, from which fruitfulness comes. It is this love that helps us to know the mind and heart of God, so that what we do is directed by God’s life-giving spirit and not by our own narrow concerns.

And, perhaps it is also this love – or our continuous yearning for it! – that is to be the primary gift of professed religious to the world today, where the sacred is so often lost in the pressure we feel to constantly “do” and achieve.

Whatever your state of life, may you always stay in touch with that great Love that sustains your life and being, and in so doing have plentiful water in your well to pour out for others.



“ Fintanto che saremo profondamente unite dal vincolo della carità, nulla ci deve preoccupare. ”

Marie Madeleine d'Houët

Fedeli Compagne di Gesù

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