



19 July 2020 Reflections: The Power on the Cell

by The Revd Philip Cochrane

I was away for a few days last week and had the chance to explore a tiny part of British Columbia – getting as far as Revelstoke and having the opportunity to visit the Sorrento Centre which, for those who do not know, is an Anglican Retreat Centre (<https://www.sorrentocentre.ca/>) Of course, for someone coming from a tiny part of the Island of Ireland, this journey was long and epic – for Canadians, this was nothing at all!

I realised the value of getting out of the city and experiencing a closeness to nature and just taking in the sheer expanse of everything. Quite quickly perspectives shifted, and the stresses and strains I had been carrying in my body and mind diminished. The beauty of the forest, the waterfalls, the mountains and the lakes.....shaped over countless years had endured many natural and human crises and were still here. Suddenly the concerns of today - the pandemic, political leadership, racism, financial crisesgained a different place and perspective. The lesson I learned is that we return to things which may be unchanged – but our perspective has...so in a sense, we have been changed.

This got me thinking of the power of having a cell in our lives. Now, you may say – I have had enough of being on my own or being stuck in my apartment and I can assure you that I empathise with that! However, a cell can be physical, but it may be something else. Perhaps we can draw from a few people to explore the theme further and see if it has a contemporary application.

Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned for something like 27 years, spoke of the power of his (prison) cell.

The cell is an ideal place to know yourself. People tend to measure themselves by external accomplishments, but jail allows a person to focus on internal ones, such as honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, generosity and an absence of variety. You learn to look into yourself.

I think this insight has a Christian application - Abba Moses, one of the great Desert fathers, would counsel his monks: ***“Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”*** What might a cell or practice teach you?

Now, I know some of you go for a walk in Stanley Park, or along the Sea Wall – perhaps you can find a cell – a spot where you can sit and be still....and be intentional about being present to God? For others of you, you make a snug – a holy place in your apartment or room, set apart for you to retreat to each day and.....be still...be present.

As I have mentioned in other places, I am increasingly convinced transformation (conversion of life) takes place in these places – but we only model the intercessory form of prayer we are familiar with on Sundays. Rather like my trip into the wilder parts of British Columbia, perspectives change and we come back to the same things but only....different, if that makes sense?

The key to the cell is that it is a place of no distraction – and this is uncomfortable and challenging....and I think that is it's power – suddenly we need to master the ability to still our hearts and minds and not be consumed with what occupies our minds the rest of the day. I find this very easy some days....and impossible on others, so please exercise compassion on yourself. Yet, rather like having been to the gym or a walk/run...I am glad I have done it...afterwards!

So, perhaps develop a practice of giving a few minutes to this every day and add a minute or two each week and see how you go? I finish with a quote from St John of the Cross:

Learn to abide with attention in loving waiting upon God in a state of quiet. Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful, and loving infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the Spirit of love.