

Talk October 2018

SING I THE LORD OF SEA AND SKY

Roots and Branches

I have been asked to tell you about some of my spiritual journey. But this could be anyone of you up here. We all have a story to tell, we are all on a journey. The reason I called this talk Roots and Branches is, as a lot of you can imagine, my roots are in Catholicism. In fact ,until I started work at 16, I had been surrounded by Catholics, well that is not entirely true. My mother was non catholic, she would have said she was C of E, as a lot of people of her generation did. She didn't go to any church though. If you married a catholic you were expected to agree to bring any children up as catholic and she did. She made sure if my father wasn't about that we went to church. I remember every Sunday afternoon there was Sunday school at 3pm. She made sure we went. This always seemed to interfere with things I wanted to do. Such as play or read. With hindsight I'm really glad she cared enough to do this.

When I was 5 we moved to a new council estate, we had been living with my maternal grandfather. When I first started school there wasn't a catholic school on the estate or for that matter a catholic church. My father took me 1 evening a week to lessons in the local non catholic school, which was the one I attended. The priest from the nearest church would come over and teach us, he came about 4 or 5 miles, and of course every Sunday we went to his church for Mass. As a catholic I wasn't allowed to attend assembly in the school either. For me being catholic was normal. My father was the youngest of 8 children so all my cousins were catholic.

When they built it I went to a catholic school, 3 or 4 of the families in the small street we lived in were catholic. My parents close friends were catholic. I went to a catholic youth club. The Lord surrounded me with Catholicism, and I am so glad. I used to think that it must be wonderful to be a convert, to have that life changing experience to want to be a catholic. That was to come later.

When I was 10 we spent a holiday with my mother's cousin who was in the RAF. This made such an impression on me that from then on I wanted to join up. It was something my parents were very much against. My father even said he would buy me a car if I didn't join. But my heavenly Father had other ideas. After basic training near Grantham in Lincolnshire I went for trade training, Air Traffic Control at RAF Shawbury near Shrewsbury. One good thing about being a catholic was that you didn't have to go on church parade. In those days you weren't allowed to even go in a non-catholic church. This is where I met Tom, Gods hand again. We were married and Tom did some retraining in what is now the SAS camp just outside Hereford. He was then posted to headquarters of Fighter Command in London and we moved to a married quarter in Ruislip. This is where once again Gods plan for me or should I say for us was at work again. We met 2 of the best friends anyone could have. Joan and Charles. Then in 1973 Tom left the RAF and we moved to Cardiff, my home. Catholicism was still very much part of my life. Masses on Sundays and Holy Days; which there were a lot of then. Our children attended catholic schools, made their 1st Holy Communion were confirmed. Believe it or not I was in the folk group. We actually made a recording to raise funds, and it sold. Tom worked at GKN steel works as security which meant he was out in all weathers, and then the management said that all security had to drive and of course Tom doesn't drive so he was made redundant. Once again God was at work... but we didn't think so at the time. After 6 months he got a job in a department store, inside all the time. Down side we lived 5 miles from the City centre and Tom was a key holder. So off he would go on his push bike when needed. He was a lot fitter and thinner then. 5 or 6 years later he was made redundant again. God working again, though I didn't think so at the time. About 8 weeks later he got a job at the Welsh Museum not only inside but no key holder and no shoplifters. God is good.

Then in 1992 my parents died and we decided to move out of Cardiff. Once again God was moving things. Our friends were living here. God was working in their lives as well. Charles had been made redundant, they had been living in London at the time and he had got a job in Malvern. So we started to look in this area for somewhere to live. and in 1993 we found our home in Lea. We were still working in Cardiff so there was a lot of traveling. Then I got a job in Hereford and some months later Tom got a job in Ross. I was attending the church in Ross. Then our friends Joan and Charles became catholic. This was really good for me as they asked questions and as a lifelong catholic it made me think about what I believed and why. I was the sort of person who accepted things, no questions... But still I thought it would be wonderful to be a convert. That God meant so much to them they would choose to be catholic. Any talks and courses which the church put on I would try and go, but as with all my married life there were lots of things I had to say no to. It wasn't fair to Tom. For about 8 or 10 years I kept saying to God " there must be more than this, where help me find it" it was such a desert place but I kept going to Mass as I always had and I kept asking.

I said earlier about being a convert, well I read recently a quote from Tim Staples (who is a convert) "I would have given anything to have had access to the sacraments from the time I was born, you've received a tremendous blessing as cradle Catholics"

Then in about 2000 there was a lady who had had to give up her car and I was giving her a lift to church. On one weekend, the only Mass I could find in the area which suited me was Newent 5.30 Saturday. I knew nothing about Newent or Gloucestershire. So we came here. Pauline knew Fr Aidan, she had been a matron at Blaisdon. From then on I went to Ross or Newent whichever suited me. Then little by little I came to Newent more and more. I remember coming to a DVD talk by Michelle Moran, some of you may know or have heard about her. Afterwards there was small group sharing. I remember Anne Fletcher and Stephanie Jamison were on my table. And that is when I had my conversion moment. Well the beginning of it. The knowledge of God's love for me went from head knowledge to heart knowledge. This is where the branches start. I did an ALPHA course and as you may know towards the end of it there is a weekend away. Well Tom was on shifts so I was able to go for the Saturday and Sunday. On the Saturday evening we were all prayed over by Tessa and Fr Aidan. I had never taken part in anything like this. I felt a bit warm but that was all. God was being gentle with me for now. About that time Mary and Simon were running the HFDS conference. Some of us from the parish went, I went just for the day on Saturday. There was lots of loud singing and people were waving their hands in the air. Your typical, if you can call it typical, charismatic worship. But Catholics don't do that sort of thing do they. I wasn't very comfortable with it, though the talks were very good. I was also going to various meetings here. I remember 1 I cant remember what it was about but I just sat there and listened. Nothing I said would be of interest. How things have changed, I'll put my twopenneth worth in now.

The next year I went to the HFDS conference, once again God was pushing rather than leading me. This is where the Holy Spirit REALLY baptized me. It is so difficult to explain Derek Williams had given a talk then he asked the HS to come and I started to laugh. Soon I was laid on the floor laughing crying. I know it sounds strange and it was but God was with me inside me all around me. It reminds me of the hymn : God before me God behind me God above me God below me God on my right hand God on my left hand. This lasted for about an hour. On the drive home I promise you I heard angels singing.

My life started to change God was changing me. I used to read quite gruesome crime novels and I watched blood thirsty things on TV as well. But no more..... A weekend in Chertsey was being arranged. It was on learning to pray for healing with people. So I put my name down and off we went. On the Saturday evening there was a healing service. People came from all over to it. There were a couple of hundred there. Damion Stayne who does it was on the stage and he asked if people had specific things wrong with them, if so and they were able they stood and those close to them laid hands on them. He said anyone with hearing problems and some stood then he mentioned tinnitus. Now I had only just realized that this was what I had. For those who don't know tinnitus is noise of some sort which you can hear all the time. I had had a noise in my head for about 50 years. I thought it was normal that everyone had it. Jeanette was one of the ones who laid hands on me. I couldn't believe it it was quiet in my head no noise. I thought miracles had stopped in the apostolic age. And they wouldn't happen to me. Well how wrong can you be. So charismatic and healing Branches.

When the HFDS conference came round again I asked Tom (as I usually did if he wanted to come) and surprise surprise he said yes. We were both prayed for by a lovely nun. The parish then ran a Life in the Spirit course. I went along to help organize it. It was for about 6 to 8 wks. Before it started those helping met every week to pray and organize things. It was during this time that I started to pray more and more. I can still remember the day when for the whole day I was aware of God's presence. God became more and more important to me. I would wake in the night with hymns and prayers going round in my head. I slowly realized that I didn't love God I was IN LOVE with him. In the meantime Gail had become a Catholic it was during her thanksgiving Mass and meal that she said it wouldn't be long till Tom joined us. She helped my faith to mature and grow. She kept pushing me, or was that God through her. Steve and Tom were helping at the conferences and they both did an RCIA course and at Easter 2012 they were received into the church. For 44 years I had asked God for this, so you see He always answers prayer but in His time and way not ours. We have an amazing God who loves us more than we can ever imagine.

I wanted to know more. At that time we had a lot going on here. Talk's, videos, and Derek Williams came to do a bible study. Which was amazing? It was about this time that Joan said to me, what has happened to my friend Jenny where has she gone. She had known me from the age of 20 and I was a very different person then. Volatile and quick tempered, looking back I don't know how Tom or my friends put up with me, I wouldn't have. How God had changed me..... I had heard people talking about spiritual direction. I felt God was saying you need one. So another branch of my journey started. For about 3 years I went to see my SD and once again God took my hand and said FOLLOW ME. About 4 years previously there had been a leaflet about a SD course which I couldn't do as it was on a day I was working. But now I was retired. So I filled in the form and said OK God I will do this but you have to give me the funding because I can't afford it. And the whole course 2 years was funded including the books we had to buy. I really think God wanted me to do it. Through the 1st couple of terms I still wasn't sure I was doing the right thing. By the start of the 2nd year I knew God knew what He was doing. It was during this course which included talks from people from other traditions that I realized how deep and strong and important to me my faith is. I know I am where God wants me to be without a shadow of a doubt.

I went on a silent retreat to Loyola which is now closed. Its Ignation and one day I sat in one of their rooms in silence and after a while I started to see my life. Two figures were sitting by a stream, then we walked and then newly married couple pushing a pram and finally a deathbed scene. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that God was showing me scenes from my life and He was there in all of them.....

OH THE WORD OF MY LORD

I have also been led into being a sacristan (not sure how that happened) well John Minihan was retiring so asked for volunteers and I with a few others volunteered. I am also a Spiritual Director, people have always talked to me I just needed to learn to listen in the right way. The one thing I had wanted to do since I was little was be an altar server. It was so unfair that girls couldn't serve when I was young. It is so amazing to be on the sanctuary during Mass to be so close when the priest consecrates the bread and wine. I am in the Holy of Holies surrounded by all the hosts of heaven.

When Gail asked me to do this talk she said what are your favorite hymns and your favorite prayers. This made me stop and think and there are so many, where to start, one day at Mass they sang O the word of my Lord and I thought yes that is where you have been in my life. And I the Lord of sea and sky, well He has sent me and lead me and always been beside me. And As I kneel before you, Mary has always had a special place in my heart. I hadn't realized prayer had played such a part in all of my life. I learnt the usual Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be..... I knelt beside my bed for my night prayers. We prayed a lot in school assembly, before and after meals. We didn't pray as a family, I don't know why..... of course as I got older lots of these prayer practices stopped but like most of us I would always pray if I needed help. The prayer in the leaflet is one I have said for many years I learnt to say it after communion as a child and I still say it now. It is my go to prayer. While I was still attending the church in Ross I learnt to pray in tongues this helps me a lot as I find it difficult to just talk to God but I am learning. So all these branches within the Catholic Church such riches. I love adoration contemplation lecio devina the rosary benediction all of them so many branches within the church. We are so blessed.

AS I KNEEL BEFORE YOU