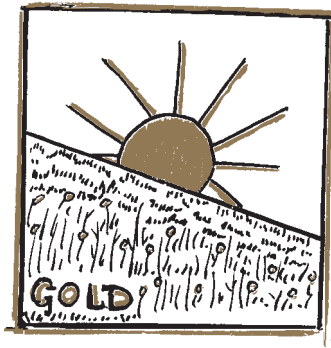


GOLD

Growing Older Living Deeper



Autumn 2009

A quarterly publication
on
Spirituality in Later Life

CONTACT INFORMATION

Subscriptions of €15 (€20 abroad) for four issues, should be sent to

GOLD,
c/o Sheila Cronin RSM,
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off Morehampton Rd,
Donnybrook,
Dublin 4,
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Cheques should be made payable to GOLD. The Editor does not handle subscriptions nor issues to do with circulation.

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GOLD

Vol. 6

Autumn 2009

No. 3

Contents	Editorial	2
	Cultivating Gentleness <i>Joe Lucey SDB</i>	4
	Reflection on Summer <i>Desmond Rushe</i>	7
	The Christian Disciple <i>Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.</i>	9
	Heroic Love <i>Bible Alive</i>	12
	God's Creatures <i>Hugh O'Donnell SDB</i>	13
	Psychological Testing <i>Author Unknown</i>	14
	Quiz and Results <i>Lucy Bruton OLC</i>	16
	The Psalms and Daily Life <i>Mary Mallon IBVM</i>	20

The season of Autumn is one that those of us in later life can identify with. For some it signals the beginning of a phase of winding down just as growth has, in most cases, ceased in the autumn of the year. This is where spirituality has the opportunity to thrive, gathering the good memories and reconciling with those that are not so good. We remember too that the broader view of spirituality is relationship with God, with oneself (through self-awareness, self care etc), with others and with nature. The opportunity to wind down in terms of work and responsibility opens up possibilities of extra time to be spent on spiritual growth. This might be a good time to remind ourselves of the place of religion and spirituality. Joan Chittester OSB in her book *Illuminated Life* (2000) considers the fact that

“Religion is about ritual, about morals, about systems of thought, all of them good but all of them incomplete. Spirituality is about coming to consciousness of the sacred. It is in that consciousness that perspective comes, that peace comes. It is in that consciousness that a person comes to wholeness.”

Desmond Rushe has charmed us during the year with his reflections on the seasons. This time he reflects back on the summer and the positive things that we may not have noticed as we waited for more sunshine and for the rain to stop.

Continuing to look at Moya Curran OP’s excellent sessions at this year’s GOLD Conference, she makes further points about Self-Care Coping Strategies. She recommends making space for positive emotional experiences – fun, humour; she suggests that older people should engage in activities which captivate the mind and energy – book club, workshop; that they choose to develop intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and also develop a capacity for asserting themselves – saying ‘no’ when you mean no and ‘yes’ when you mean yes. Moya referred to the book by Albert Nolan called ‘Jesus Today’ with special reference to some particular chapters, one of which is entitled “Getting to Know Yourself”.

Moving on to next year's GOLD Conference, the committee wondered should we consider running a Conference outside Dublin? Whether this materialises or not would depend entirely on the demand and the subsequent numbers registering for attendance, so please fill in the page included in this issue if you have a view about this suggestion.

In July this year the Irish Hospice Foundation had one of its End-of-Life Forum Workshops at which Religious, Spiritual and Faith groups presented their views on meeting spiritual needs towards the end of people's lives. Presentations were made from the perspective of the Church of Ireland, Society of Friends, hospital Chaplains and a representative of the Catholic Bishops Consultative Group on Bioethics. Points made included the following – that the system should be compassionate; that people need to be treated with dignity and that Ireland is not a secular but a pluralist society. Those responsible for organising the conference would like to hear from anybody (including our readers) with a view on End-of-Life issues and they will be holding a Public Forum on Wednesday 16th September 2009. Enquiries to 01 6755970 re venue etc. Details can also be found on their website www.endoflife.ie

The closing date for submission of articles or other material for our next issue is 1st November 2009. We are pleased to say that a small number of lay women have sent in material for which we are very grateful.

The winner of the Summer quiz will find her name of p19 On the same page you will find a message from Lucy to clarify the issue of 'dingbats'. Entries should go directly to Lucy Bruton and not to the Editor, as Lucy holds all the answers.

God bless,

Mary Threadgold rsc

Editor

CULTIVATING GENTLENESS

Joe Lucy, SDB

St Francis de Sales is often referred to as the Apostle of Gentleness. In fact it is this quality of gentleness which was one of the main factors which led John Bosco to choose Francis as his model and years later to choose him as the Patron of his new congregation, the Salesians, followers of de Sales. Francis himself wrote much about gentleness. For him it was not something soft, nor was it an easy option. He used to say. "There is nothing as strong as gentleness, nothing as gentle as real strength."

Anger

But why is it that we can often find it difficult to be gentle? What is going on within us, when we find ourselves caught up in a fire or passion which leads us to be anything but gentle with those around us? One of the emotions, or set of emotions which hinders us from being gentle relates to our anger. To a large extent, a central task in the cultivating of gentleness, involves identifying and attending to our anger. It is not always easy for us to admit that we are angry people., Often our anger is something we are ashamed of, something we prefer to hide. We don't like the way we are when we get angry. Usually our anger has a focus. We might be angry with an employer, a colleague, a member of our family. We might also be angry with an institution, an organisation, a government, a law. We may also be angry with ourselves. This self-directed anger often presents itself in the form of depression . At other times our anger may not have any clear focus, we might feel angry with life, with the way things have generally turned out for us. We may live in such a way that there is a passive or seething anger there in the background of our lives, not always finding appropriate expression.

Hurt

In a very simple way, but in a way which seems to ring true for our lives, what is common to all our angers is that they come from places of hurt deep within us. My anger is like an energy which is festering away, seeping out from an inner wound which has not yet found healing. My anger is like my inner wounded self, crying out for help.

A Mother's Way

The Vietnamese monk, Venerable Thich Nhat Hahn, uses a very simple image to help us identify and attend to our anger. In so doing he also assists us in cultivating gentleness in our lives. The image is of a mother who responds to the crying of her little son. When the mother hears her little one crying, she instinctively reaches out and holds her son in her arms, to comfort him and reassure him that she is near, and that things are going to be alright. As the little one's tears begin to ease, and the sobbing is less intense, the mother then asks her son, "What is the matter? What happened to you? Where are you hurting?" and the little boy is then able to point to the sore or tell his mother where he is hurting, how he is frightened, or what has caused his upset. She is then able to attend to the source of the pain, washing and dressing the wound, kissing it with healing and with reassuring hope.

TWO STAGES.

There are two stages in the mother's response and these are the same two stages or movements which we can also employ in responding to our experience of our anger. First we need to hold ourselves tenderly. When I am angry I need to go to a quiet place as soon as I can and simply hold myself in my anger recognising that this anger is coming from a wound which festers deep within me. I need to be gentle with myself here, not scolding myself or punishing myself for the fact that I am angry. After a while, as the intensity of the emotion begins to ease, I need, like the mother to listen deeply to my anger, listen deeply to the hurt which is underlying my pain. Sometimes, I may need the help of

another, to talk things over, in order to really identify where this anger is coming from, or why there is such intensity to its expression. But essentially, I need to listen deep within, with great gentleness and tenderness, attending to my anger, to my wounded self, as a mother would attend to her hurting child.

By spending time identifying and attending to my anger, I will find I am growing in strength, in the inner strength of gentleness, gentleness not just with myself, but with all those others, who also share this fragile and beautiful life.

PRAYER FOR EVENTIDE.

Lord Jesus, help me to live the eventide of life with sincerity, trusting you to continue to provide for my needs, as you have always done. Destroy in me self-pity and remind me to often count my blessings. Forgive those who have hurt me and let no bitter thoughts, the destroyers of peace, find a harbour in my mind.

Fill my heart, loving Saviour, with gratitude towards those who show consideration for me and reward them for their kind deeds. Make me quick to apologise for my blunders, be careful not to criticize others and be generous in giving whatever help I can. Let me be alert, Jesus, to notice the goodness in people and inspire me to say a friendly, encouraging word to them.

As each day closes, dear Lord, pardon me my failures and surround me with your protective love and when my final call come, may I answer it willingly, full of hope of companionship with you for all eternity. Amen.

A SUMMER REFLECTION.

Desmond Rushe

It is a reasonable assumption that Summer is the most maligned of seasons – wrongly and unfairly. We more or less get what we expect from Autumn, Winter and Spring, but Summer invariably lets us down. And this is because we expect too much of it; our expectations are pitched at an absurdly unrealistic level considering that, in these latitudes at any rate, Summer has an extremely modest record in climatic performance.

As long ago as 1826 poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge noted that “Summer has set in with its usual severity”. And in the intervening years there have been innumerable literary references to the season’s consistency in producing very unpleasant weather conditions. Nevertheless we persist in automatically associating Summer with sunshine or, at least, the sun, and in hoping for spells of warm, blue-skied, sunshiny days which end in a balm of lingering twilights and golden sunsets – as if we were in the barge with King Arthur, being propelled by Tennyson’ to the island-valley of Avilion/where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow’ – and ever sun shines brightly .

Of course the weather is of immense importance, and not just for the trifling reasons of holidays, barbecues and the like. Crop yields are at the mercy of Summer elements; I can recall the awful drudgery of trying to make hay or save turf in a prolonged spell of rain, and the heartbreak of swathes of ripening wheat being flattened when a whipping wind accompanied the rain. But, inured by experience, people accepted such things with resignation and a wisdom which brought a balanced perspective to the scene – a perspective not without its touch of humour.

“That’s a nice soft day, thanks be to God” was a normal greeting, even

anyone”, or “You won’t melt; sure you’re not made of sugar”. And always to counterbalance the effects of bad weather, there was an unspoken consciousness of the immeasurable bounty of Summer’s gift to nature.’ Oscar Wilde confessed that he trembled with pleasure when he remembered that ‘The lilac and the laburnum will be blooming the gardens, and I will see the one toss the pale purple of its plumes while the wind stirs into restless beauty the swaying gold of the other until all the air will be Arabia to me’. The people I have quoted would understand perfectly how Wilde felt.

Lilac and laburnum, rhododendron and fuchsia; petunia, rose, buddleia, gladiola, delphinium and hundred of other plants and flowers are part of Summer’s exquisite patchwork quilt, and lush green grass which could not be so lush without the moisture. However uncertain its weather pattern may be, Summer’s compensations are enormous – at least in this country. I have almost suffocated in a sweltering New York where both temperature and humidity hovered around 100 degrees; we have all read of droughts, raging forest fires, tornados, typhoons and other natural disasters in different parts of the Summer world, and it all makes you think, and wonder if the idyllic season of the most fertile imagination exists, or could exist.

It may be pleasant to get away from Irish Summer weather for a couple of weeks, but it is infinitely more pleasant to get back to it – and its fine, soft days, thanks be to God. Maybe, when all is said and done, we are closer to the idyll than anywhere else on earth.

‘I will not wish you riches, nor the glow of greatness, but that wherever you go some weary heart shall gladden at your smile, some weary life know sunshine for a while, and so your path shall be a track of light, like angels’ footsteps passing through the night’

Author unknown

THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE.

Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap

A Christian disciple is someone who forgives much because he appreciates that he has been forgiven much.

In the immortal words of Alexander Pope: 'to err is human, to forgive, divine.' Forgiveness of a hurt is part of the victory of divine life over evil. In practice there is no greater test of genuine Christianity than the willingness to forgive others.

Jesus Christ came on a mission of liberation and reconciliation. He announced that he would open closed eyes and ears, break open the chains of captives, cleanse the lepers and raise the dead. It was good news for the poor. His miracles to heal the body illustrated the healing and liberation that he brought to souls. When his compassion touched people they were able to let go of the anger and resentment which had bound them captive.

I remember reading the story told by Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher, about his grandfather. Old Grandpa was paralysed. He was asked to tell about the holy man who was the teacher and inspiration of his youth. As Grandpa relived his memories he began to imitate the movements and expressions of his teacher of long ago. All gazed in wonder as the paralysed man moved and stood and virtually danced through his memories. He was healed of his paralysis as memory brought him back to the days before the experiences of life which had caused his ailment.

The story left me wondering how many of the chains that bind people belong to anger and resentment which they may not consciously recognise. But the sub-conscious knows with its own dark way of knowing.

Buried resentment and seething anger bind a person in muscular tension which is very often associated with headache, back pains, stomach ulcers, asthma, stress on the face and pressure on the heart. The chains that bind us are often located in areas of unforgiveness in our conscious and unconscious memories. Psycho-somatic illnesses are seen in the body but are rooted in the mind. The pain is not the root of the trouble. Treating the ache brings only temporary relief. Better to regard the pain as a cry from repressed hurt, anger, tiredness or bitterness. This area is coming increasingly to light as attention is given to the victims of rape or child abuse and to the mental stresses inflicted by parents through divorce or alcoholism.

When the person who perpetrated the hurt is of close kinship it may be very difficult to admit one's anger. But if there is anger, it must be recognised before one moves towards forgiveness. Forgiveness is very different to turning a blind eye on one's hurt or pretending that nothing has happened. If we do not admit our hurt the danger is that we take it into ourselves and hide it. Then it is dangerous.

The church does not ask us to forget our hurts. On the contrary we are asked to face them, name them and talk them out in the light of confession.

One great obstacle to finding forgiveness is a tendency to self-pity, a sort of martyr complex. People can be in love with their hurts because it makes them feel that they deserve sympathy. You will hear self-pity being expressed in sentiments of vengeance and a certain glee when somebody gets his comeuppance.

St Francis of Assisi had the wisdom of true sanctity when he described anger as a sin against the virtue of poverty: for he saw that there were people who might give up every material possession but hold on to what he called 'the purse of anger.'

One meets people who harbour bitterness about parents, school, the church, the system, the rich, the authorities and that anonymous collection of A.N. Others gathered under 'they.' They did this, they caused that, they ran the system, they made the rules. Mister A or Father B or Sister C may have done me wrong. If they have sinned then that is their problem. But if I harbour anger and resentment towards them, then I too have a problem. I have been infected by their poison. Now there are two wrongs, a situation which rarely makes a right.

Isn't it significant that when Jesus spoke about the man who would not forgive his fellow servant, the image which dominates the story is prison? To harbour resentment or to hold on to hurt memories is to be imprisoned: bound in chains and paralysed. But to overcome all bitterness and anger is to be released.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned...and released...healed...and restored

When we think 'This is an impossible situation', God says 'All things are possible (Luke 18:27). When we complain, 'I'm just too tired', God says, 'I will give you rest' (Matt.11:28-30). When we succumb to thinking, 'Nobody loves me', God says 'I love you' (John 3:16).

When we are at our wits end and think, 'I can't go on', God says 'My grace is sufficient for you (2.Cor 12:9). When we say 'I don't know where I'm going', God says, 'I will direct your steps' (Prov. 3: 5-6). Whenever we think 'I can't forgive myself', God says, 'I forgive you' (1 John 1:9). Whenever we fall prey to fear and feel alone, God says 'I will never leave you or forsake you' (Heb. 13:5)

(ref. Bible Alive)

HEROIC LOVE.

(Courtesy of Bible Alive)

Captain Charles Sulenberger III is a hero. He is the pilot who last January landed his stricken aeroplane so smoothly on the Hudson River. What may not be as well known is that on landing he immediately left his seat to make sure all the passengers were safe. He came across one passenger whose shirt had been ripped and torn from him, leaving the poor man shivering in the icy cold of the New York winter. Captain Sulenberger, without a second thought for his own comfort, took off his own shirt and gave it to the man. He is the perfect example of someone who would literally give you the shirt off his back to help!

His conduct is of course, an inspiring example of precisely the kind of love, agape love, to which we, as Christians are called. Jesus did not suggest that his highest form of love was a good idea or was optional or was something we might consider. He commanded it; this is my commandment, that you love one and other as I have loved you. Everything revolves around our capacity or ability to love. Of all the virtues this is the one we are to pursue. This is the one which Jesus specifically commanded.

To love then is our vocation and to put love into practice is an art or craft we would dedicate our lives to learning and mastering. In the course of life we seek to master many different skills and abilities, but rarely do we wake up and say to ourselves. "My task today is to love because this is what Jesus demanded me to do" The great thespian and writer Peter Ustinov said " Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes habit". Perhaps that is the point; we need to cultivate love, practice it, take it up daily, examine our lives by it and do our utmost to live by it. We must then become students of love, pupils of this holy art from, as Lord Byron once said, "those who learn love, will always be it's scholars".

GOD'S CREATURES.

Hugh O'Donnell SDB

Driving along, I notice a dead body by the roadside. No one has stopped. Could it be that no one has noticed. True, it doesn't look like anyone we know wrapped up in a fur coat but it has the signs of a hit and run.

The adult badger did not go home last night. Impossible to think that he was not missed. Convenient to say that badgers spread disease and don't feel like we do. Of course, we could equally say that we don't feel like they do.

In my passing glance he looked thrown there without a second thought as though life did not once flow as knowingly through his whole being as through ours. It occurred to me that few tears, if any, would be shed for a neighbour who lived locally, had raised a family, learnt to survive with a unique intelligence, praise God in his own way. Yet no Good Samaritan might be expected to stop to check his wounds or say a prayer. The Road Safety Authority would not add his death to their list.

I was visiting my friends in Thomastown recently when 3 year old Naoise emerged from the garden shouting delightedly, "God's creature" and showing us the ant in his hand. This I thought, must be what it means to accept the Kingdom of God like a child, to understand that other forms of life are made with the same loving care as we are, that we are truly brothers and sisters.

"No seed ever sees the flower"

Zen saying

PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING.

To: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Woodcrafter carpenter.
Nazareth. 25922

From: Jordan Management Consultants
Jerusalem 26544

Dear Sir,

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organisation. All of them have now taken our battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

The profiles of all tests are included, and you will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service and for your guidance, we make some general comments, much as an auditor will include some general statements. This is given as a result of staff consultations and comes without any additional fee.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better

Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contact in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and righthand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants.

To celebrate growing older, a lady called Regina Brett from Cleveland, Ohio, wrote the 45 lessons life taught her. Here are some of them.

1. Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
3. Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.
4. Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and parents will. Stay in touch.
5. You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.
6. Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
7. It's OK to get angry with God. He can take it.

AUTUMN QUIZ.

Please send to Sr. Lucy Bruton, 206, Gracepark Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, by November 1st, 2009

1. What did the Israelites eat in the desert? (5)
2. How high is an equine “hand”? (4,6)
3. Who composed the “Song of Joy “ which is the anthem of the European Union? (9)
4. The berries of what shrub are used to make gin? (7)
5. Which city is known as the Windy City? (7)
6. Where would you find a ‘Plimsoll Line’? (2,1,4)
7. What is the Society of Friends more commonly known as? (7)
8. Who are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael? (10)
9. What country was home to Sir Edmund Hillary? (3,7)
10. What are the aurora borealis also known as? (8,6)
11. What God-given gift did Moses receive at Mount Sinai? (3,12)
12. What Irish politician wrote a spy novel called The Riddle of the Sands? (7,8)
13. What explosive device was invented by Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Peace Prize? (8)
14. What city saw the assassination that sparked the First World War?(8)
15. Whose partner was Jacob Marley? (7)
16. What was the name of Sherlock Holmes’ smarter brother? (7)
17. What European head of state wears a crown but is not a monarch? (4)
18. What is the seventh planet from the Sun? (6)
19. “There are six counties in the province of Ulster;” (True or false)
20. What four legged friend went with Dorothy from Kansas to Oz? (4)
21. What is the world’s longest river? (4)
22. Who was the first woman ever elected to the British Parliament? (9, 10)
23. Who is the patron saint of lovers? (2,9)

24. What happened at 11 am on 11th November, 1918? (3,2,5,5,3)
 25. What does 'amen' mean? (2,2,2)
 26. What American state has the nickname 'The Lone Star State'? (5)
 27. What is the Muslim holy book called? (5)
 28. What person was said to be the inspiration and namesake of the teddy bear? (8,9)
 29. If you had a painful patella, which part of your body would hurt? (4)
 30. What is the Capital of Australia? (8)
-

SEEING YOU TODAY.

Lord, don't allow me to let you pass by
without seeing you today.

Don't allow me to ignore your Presence
in the beggar on the pavements
the blind man crossing over.
the moving crowds surging on and on
Let me not pretend I do not see them
without seeing YOU in them today.

Don't allow me, Lord, to let You pass
without an inner word to say, "I know you"!
Don't allow me to let You pass
without a leap of JOY to say, "I love you"!
(Without a "seeing" friend, there is no joy)

After all, Lord, We have been friends for many years!"
In truth we have been friends for over ninety years"
So don't allow me Lord, to miss seeing you after so many,
many years"
" This joy", you said, "No one can take from you."

Bernadine Renwick. IBVM

ANSWERS TO THE SUMMER QUIZ.

1. Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt,.....what/who comes next and why? **Lincoln/Mount Rushmore.**
2. What is the name of the latest James Bond film? **Quantum of Solace.**
3. What is the most southerly state of the United States of America. **Hawaii**
4. What two words were used for payments to help former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern? **Dig out.**
5. What time is when Wee Willie Winkie appears? **Eight o'clock**
6. What runs through the mouth of the Amazon river and Lake Victoria besides water? **Equator**
7. What word can go before "hem" and after "gall" to make another word? **ant**
8. What do British stamps NOT have on them that most other stamps do? **Name of country**
9. According to Beatrix Potter, what type of creature was Mr. Jeremy Fisher? **Frog**
10. In what year was the Dublin Millennium Spire completed? **2003**
11. What links a Dublin cinema with cabbage and Gilbert and Sullivan? **Savoy**
12. Which of Disney's seven dwarfs comes last alphabetically? **Sneezy**
13. What type of tree is mentioned in the song "Waltzing Matilda" **Coolibah**
14. In Irish names like O'Brien, O'Gara, what does the "O" mean? **Grandson/descendant**
15. The following combinations are quite unusual but each one is part of a word, exactly as it appears in that word. What are the words? XYG. XOP. WKW. **oxygen/saxophone/awkward.**
16. Can you solve this "dingbat" JOANB . **An inside job**
17. Who is the Swiss inventor of Dynamite? **Alfred Nobel**
18. What is the name of a poetic drama by Goethe, or an opera by Gounod? **Faust**
19. What is a blocking vote? **veto**

20. What is the capital city of Lithuania. **Vilnius**
21. What article is a musical event? **recital**
22. What is the name of the town in the Netherlands, made famous for its cheese. **Edam**
23. What is the Japanese unity of currency? **yen**
24. What is the post-war capital of Germany? **Bonn**
25. What is the name of the London street, home to the British Prime Minister? **Downing**
26. What is the name of the ship used by Ernest Shackleton during his 1908 expedition to the Antarctic ? **Nimrod**
27. Came to the highest point of achievement. **acme**
28. What was the name of the Olympic Gold Medallist in 1936, who made Hitler so angry. **Jesse Owens**
29. What state calls its parliament "Knesset"? **Israel**
30. Or surround the alternative. **other**

The winner of the Summer quiz with only two answers incorrect is...

**Sr. Paula Hennessy,
Ursuline Convent,
Waterford**

Well done, your €50 prize will be on the way to you shortly.

NOTE from Sr. Lucy Bruton –

"Dear sisters, A "dingbat" is a "written picture", depicting a well known phrase in a quirky way. So the answer to the dingbat in the quiz is 'An inside job'. To explain it look at the letters. (JO'an'B) Job is the word and 'an' is inside it. Better luck next time."

Lucy

THE PSALMS & DAILY LIFE.

Mary Mallon, IBVM

How rich your goodness, Lord for those who fear you. How much you do, so all can see, for those who trust in you. (Psalm 31)

Nursery rhymes were not always intended for the nursery. They describe people and events, tales of dishonest dealings in the days of King Henry VIII, for example, John Horner, steward to the Abbot of Glastonbury, was on his way to London, his mission – to convey to the Crown title deeds of several manors surrendered by the Abbot to the King. They were sent, not in box, but in a huge Christmas pie! Jack Horner opened the pie and pulled out a plum title deed for himself! Thomas Cromwell bettered himself too – stole a pig and away did run! Far from being children’s jingles nursery rhymes describe people and events – real life situations which could make psalms come alive to us. Psalms tell of experiences either in the life of an individual or in the story of the People of Israel. To understand a psalm better we should try to discover what condition or event lies behind it. We will then see a whole new world of meaning in words whose apt sense had escaped us. Obvious examples are the fifteen *Caravan or Pilgrim Songs* (Psalms 120 to 134) which were sung on the way up to Jerusalem for the three big yearly feasts – Passover, Weeks and Tents. So in Psalm 121 “*I lift up my eyes to the hills The Lord will guard your coming and going*” makes complete sense. It describes an anxious pilgrim setting out on the journey to Jerusalem and receiving at the end of the pilgrimage a blessing for the return journey.

By careful reading we can discover a psalm’s *life-situation*. From hints in the text we can seek out its living context. Using imagination we can picture the *sitz im leben*. Look at the two illustrations of very different moments in Psalm 31; the first picture shows a dejected psalmist as an object of scorn, whispered about, a mockery to his neighbours. But the second shows a joyful psalmist blessing the Lord who showed him marvellous mercy!

What has made the difference? What situation brought about this change? Whether we are right or wrong in guessing is immaterial so long as we test our thinking against clues in the text itself to confirm that we imagine. Early in this psalm there is mention of shame and a cry for rescue and talk of my affliction and my distress. My bones waste away, says the psalmist, I am a reproach, an object of scorn.....those who see me in the street run far away from me. Why should they run away?

Later talk is of God's goodness and shelter and being kept safe. Blessed be the Lord who has shown me the wonders of his love, says the psalmist. Love the Lord, he exhorts friends. Be strong, take heart!

Why is he worn out by suffering, the object of neighbour's taunts, shunned by former friends, as little regarded as a dead man or a broken bowl? *Wasted eyes; broken strength; diseased bones* do suggest serious illness. Has he plummeted into the depths of dreaded and loathsome leprosy? People do react to him with revulsion. They not only avoid him but whisper about him, even plot to kill him. But he has recovered. Do our verses then refer to the psalmist's readmission to the Temple for a ritual of purification and thanksgiving? In a *Guide to the Psalms* John Hargreaves suggests that we question a psalm. And the first question to ask is –*what is the life experience behind it?*

What has the school of prayer to say here? In a discourse on Ps. 31 St. Augustine wrote: *If the psalm prays, pray: if it hopes, hope: and if it fears, be afraid. Everything that is written here is a mirror in which we see ourselves. Psalm 30 says: Sing psalms to God unceasingly. Lord you turned my mourning into dancing, pulled off my sackcloth and wrapped me in gladness.*

“Without beauty we miss the glory of the face of God in the here
and now”

Joan Chittester, OSB

GOLD

GOLD began in 1998 as a voluntary intercongregational group with a special interest in helping to meet the spiritual needs of older people.

The Group comprises:-

A CHAIRPERSON who is elected from among the group for one year, renewable for three years.

A COMMITTEE: A group of voluntary people who commit themselves for two years at a time.

The average number of meetings is four in any year.

At present the main work of the group is the production of "GOLD" Magazine, which has a readership of approximately 500. For this we have an editorial committee of three. Whereas this is adequate for the time being it is necessary to consider the future and "succession" for the future. Further expertise in this field is needed immediately, particularly in the area of promotion and marketing. There is an openness here for someone who may not be a member of a religious order. We have also begun again to hold our annual conferences on spirituality and related topics.

We are actively seeking new members as it is the opinion of the present committee that with a new energetic thrust, perhaps other services could be provided. We believe that new members, religious or lay, could bring a new vision, energy and enthusiasm to the group as well as new ideas as regards how to meet the spiritual needs of older people.

We appreciate your support and we welcome all enquiries to:

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Donnybrook, Dublin 4. Email: healthcare@cori.ie