

Seasons of the Spirit: Week 4

Summer: Prayer and reflection exercises

From Gemma Simmonds talk:

Summer is where we let go, spiritually speaking, of the safety rail, and swim out into the deep. The scripture readings and the structure of the liturgy in the summer are less directive and leave us to make what we can of the mysteries of faith embodied in the incarnate and glorified Jesus. This is the time of the flowering of faith, when we set about making sense of the earlier seasons that draw us into the mysteries of his incarnation. Now we walk by faith and not by sight, growing into a deeper awareness of how the everyday is fruitful with the presence of God.

'This is my body' becomes an invitation to contemplate the risen Jesus in the other, to experience the presence of God in human encounters.

This week, reflect on one encounter with another person [whether face to face or online].

- What different feelings and thoughts were taking place for you during this encounter?
- In your imagination, see this person and listen again to their voice. What are the particular qualities of this person, as you experience them? Is there some way in which the light of the incarnation shines within them?
- Was there any way in which this encounter mirrored back to you something about yourself?
- Thank God for whatever insights you have received, and in your mind, bless the person you have been contemplating.

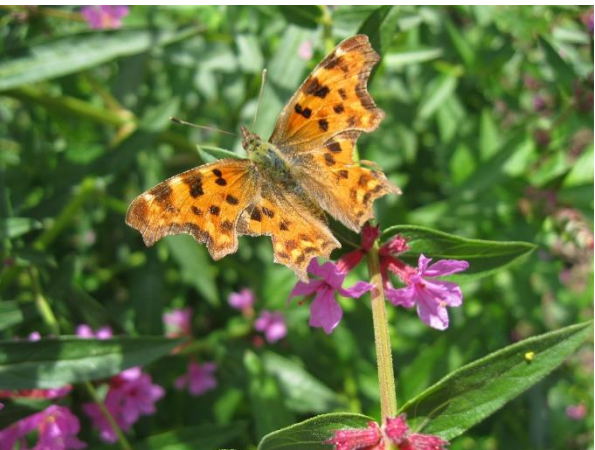
Summer is also a time when our own bodies are more apparent. One of the delights of an English summer lies in being able to shed layers and carry round fewer protective barriers between our bodies and the cold and damp of the external world. Behaviour becomes less guarded: people sit in parks picnicking over lunch breaks, take coffee outside, sit at pavement cafes instead of huddling indoors. Summer becomes a time for reconnecting with the natural light, the greater opportunities for communal living afforded by being able to sit out of doors for longer, watching children playing and people talking outside instead of sitting enclosed. There is a sense of a general relaxing into the present, a willingness to linger over meals or encounters, savouring the moment, allowing the time to flow by.

Gemma reminds us that summer invites us to move away from our addictive busyness and linger in the present, open and relaxed. What gets in the way of you resting in the presence of God, and being wholly present to those you live alongside? What drives you? Imagine these barriers as layers of clothing that clutter and confine you. One by one,

remove these layers, letting each one fall to the ground.



The warmth and light of summer bring so much enrichment in sight and scent and touch and taste. Perhaps part of the spiritual gift of summer is an invitation to a more contemplative approach to ordinary things: the feel and scent and taste of food, of flowers and plants, sea air, sunlight and warmth, fresh wind and the sound of cities, streets and gardens unusually alive.



Each day this week spend 5 minutes in your senses.

Look at the sky.
Listen to birds or the sound of rain.
Go out at night under the stars.
Close your eyes and feel the warmth of the sun, or the movement of the breeze.

What does it mean to have a spiritual approach to summer that copes with and challenges the tyranny of the fashion and diet industries, laden as they are with the doom-filled message that our bodies are only acceptable if they conform to a standard of beauty achieved by few? 'This is my body' becomes an invitation to accept and honour own own embodiedness and to live more at ease within our enfleshed selves.

Honour the gift of your own body. Give thanks for how it has carried you through your days. Your feet that have walked...your hands that have touched and created...the marks on your skin that tell of your story...your five senses that enrich your days...the gentle movement of your body as you breathe.

Spend time being prayerfully aware of your body and – whatever you have felt up to now – bless this body that God has created and that expresses who you are.



An eighteenth-century spiritual author wrote about what he called 'the sacrament of the present moment'. A sacrament is a sign which makes real what it signifies. When we learn to live in and relish the present moment, it can liberate us from the tyranny of time, dominated by market forces and the idolization of work, of cost effectiveness, of productiveness as value. Wasting time with the God whose times and seasons are full of generous wastefulness can remind us of what truly matters.

Make an active choice this week to waste some time with God. However demanding the week or the day is, work in some small holidays: pauses and breaths where you can take in the moment, in God's company.

Some Bible readings for prayer and reflection:

Luke 12.22-34 / Psalm 131 / Psalm 108.1-5 / Mark 14.22-25 / John 21.1-14