



SIEBENQUELL

When the hearth does not go out and prayer turns from boredom into an adventure for life



John O'Donohue writes in his book 'The Four Elements': »The hearth is a powerful metaphor for the spiritual quest, for the hearth is where the heart is at home. This is the longing in all spirituality: to come in from the winter of alienation, self-division and exile into the inner self and the hearth of warmth and at-one-ment.«

Like around a hearth, we gathered for a week on the Ritten in the South Tyrolean mountains to make the great prayer culture of the Celtis Christians our own. We learnt texts, prayers and songs from the Celtic tradition, which we interpreted on the basis of God's stories in order to sing, pray and reflect on the Gospel and our lives, with all our doubts and questions.

How do we live with the things that are given? We began the week with this question and it accompanied us through all the days of the »Herdfeuer« (Hearth) course week.

Do we genuinely pose this question, or do we not mostly complain about what is given and which strikes us as a hindrance, combined with the expectation that someone will solve the problems for us?

Our course leaders Rosemarie Monnerjahn and Erik Riechers gently and purposefully led us away from this expectation towards a lively dialogue with our Creator.

Many times, during these days I was reminded of a time when pre-formulated prayers were still foreign to me and that my childlike relationship with Jesus was already an expression of my inner life. I continued the path with Jesus and placed my life at his service. I have learnt prayers that I no longer say today; they have become foreign to me because they do not correspond to my relationship with God.

In the past few days of the 'hearth fire', I have experienced confirmation in this, have been able to deepen my relationship with God and have also discovered new and challenging things.

»When prayer turns from boredom into an adventure of life« has become a real experience for me.

We began the days with a prayer entitled »Too much baggage« by Kathy Galloway, which includes the decision to travel lighter. We were accompanied by the story of Jesus sending out the 12 disciples with the mission to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal the sick. In particular, Jesus' words about what they should NOT take with them on this journey - and the WHY - were brought into our lives. What do we need for our journey through life and what do we burden ourselves with? And the question: 'Who are we travelling with, who am I travelling with?' is particularly important. Are we travelling with the one who wants and loves us, who knows us by name, who knows our face?

The biblical stories are often unfamiliar to us and even those that seem familiar to us require an interpretation that relates to our lives and experiences. So, the second day was based on a prophetic story, Ezekiel 47, alongside the Celtic prayer »Immersion« by Pat Bennett. Living water flows from the temple, but the land - our life - determines where the water flows. The living water must flow into the world, or it will not bring life or fruit.

The prophet is led by his companion along the river and is told to enter the water. He is led step by step, accompanied attentively and walks deeper and deeper through the water. And then the question: 'Have you seen it, son of man?' See what? Where the water flows, life is born. The water gives life, even to me, if I dare to let myself be led and walk through it. It takes my courage and my determination to step in, to choose life, to DARE.

The third day had a very unusual name: »The Glory in the Grey« and a prayer by George MacLeod. We all know the grey areas of life, those experiences that cause uncertainty, situations in which we are manoeuvred into a tension that we don't know how to deal with. But what do they have in common with glory? If we engage them, we will find God in these grey areas. He is able to surprise us, can touch us in unexpected situations and thus offers us spiritual growth. If we engage these areas, if we want to practise this, we will experience something of the tenderness of God, because it is a path with COMPANIONS and a path that frees us from black and white thinking. Do we only associate God with the beautiful experiences of life and do we believe that he has abandoned us as soon as things go badly for us?

Our experiences of God are more varied and richer. God is in our questions and in our experiences, not in the solutions. In many parables we have discovered that it is about asking for the possibilities, seeking them, finding them and choosing them. We find God in the effect (leaven) and the memory and experience (merciful father) of what we experience: Generosity, sincerity, willingness to serve, honesty

»God, help us to grow, like a garden, like a song, like a tree «says a Celtic prayer by Kathy Galloway. Inner growth is the objective here. The Celtic image of the tree goes from the roots to the trunk to the crown, symbolising the circle of life. Love needs the living. Not all people love life, not even their own. We are asked to CHOOSE the gift of our life. »Life and death I set before you, choose life...« says the book of Deuteronomy 30:19. We should shape the gift of our life, dare to do so and consciously and actively participate in it. »All gifts from God have an expiry date,« we heard this morning. Thus, there is also the possibility of being too late!

At this point, we were asked to consider the difference between a wish and a desire. Do I wish to grow like a tree (and for someone else to fulfil my wish) or is it my longing to grow, for which I am prepared to become active myself?

We know from our own experiences that injuries, wounds and scars are part of growth. They are part of our life and maturing. Will I bless or curse them? Am I prepared to go into the depths of my life and engage in these processes of growth? And do I want to grow in such a way that, like a tree, I offer shelter, shade and protection to OTHERS? These are not questions that are easily answered and not questions that we should merely answer without first listening carefully to ourselves.

On our last day together, we connected our lives very closely with the life of Jesus, or rather his life with ours. This is how we prayed with Kathy Galloway:

Lord Jesus, It's good to know
that you lived in the flesh
walked where we walk, felt what we feel,
got tired, had sore and dirty feet,
needed to eat, and think about
where the next meal was coming from.

But it's even better to know
that you enjoyed your food
the feel of perfume on your skin
the wind on your face, a child in your arms
and the good wine at the wedding.

You didn't mind when people touched you,
even those who were thought of as unclean.
You kissed people with diseases
and laid your head on your friend's shoulder.
Thank you for understanding our bodily pains and pleasures
and for valuing them.

All of Jesus' human experiences, from his birth to his death, what he savoured, his joys and his tears, his human touches, what drove him and what he suffered from - we know all of this very intimately in our own lives. Nothing human is alien to Jesus or to us. In Jesus, God enters our world, my world. He shows solidarity with our lives, with my life. The certainty of our belonging is born out of our similar experiences. This makes us his confidants

and his companions. His trust in us and our trust in him is our foundation. At the same time, this experience expands our lives; after all, it means that we too should 'enter' the world of our neighbour, that we are on a journey for each other and with each other. The story of the Book of Ruth tells us where this attitude leads: to more life!

In the middle of this prayer, the woman praying says that it is even better to know what Jesus enjoyed in his life: his food, feeling the scent on his skin, the wind on his face, a child in his arms and the good wine at the wedding.

This part of the prayer particularly surprised and touched me; and I enjoyed it the most of all! Jesus' enjoyment does not speak of consumption, but of the fact that he consciously recognises and deeply appreciates what is possible for him and what is given to him.

For me, this also includes the part that speaks of Jesus' touches:

*»You didn't mind when people touched you,
even those who were thought of as unclean.
You kissed people with diseases
and laid your head on your friend's shoulder.«*

Familiarity seeks and facilitates closeness and touch. And I can enjoy that too.

The abundance of our Hearthfire Days was a unique invitation to dare to live our lives with this God. Together with him, we will seek AND find solutions to obstacles. Together with him, we will be able to truly shape crises! Together with him, we can enjoy what has been given and bestowed upon us.

As God's confidants and companions, we should stay in dialogue with him about everything that touches and moves us, that gladdens our hearts, that fills us with gratitude, that frightens us and makes us suffer. In this way, prayer can become an adventure in life.

Sr. M. Josefa op

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