

Called to *mystical* Attentiveness



Priority
M1
STORIES

Erica Pegorer, Melbourne

Deepening in Members their commitment in Christian discipleship

God's invitation to us does not necessary come as a once off event in the same way you would receive an invitation to a wedding or to join a club. It is not the sort of invitation whereby you attend this 'event', hopefully have a good time and later, maybe years hence, draw on the memories created. For some of us in our lives, we might have been fortunate enough to have had a 'Road to Damascus' experience but it is more likely that for many of us, God's invitation is much more subtle. In the everyday, we are prodded and poked to be part of God's life and depending on what is going on for us at the time, we might be fully attuned to the invitation or our senses might be dulled to it.

One thing I have learnt throughout my own faith journey is that, my senses are heightened, my hearing is honed and my focus is sharper when two things happen. Firstly, when I take the time to pray and to "be still and know that I am" (Psalm 46:10), I am more reflective and attuned not only to my worries and pressures but also I am more fully present to others. When I bring silence and calmness to my day, God is acutely present and I am more open to hear God's will for me.

Secondly, when my heart and mind feel in communion with God, I draw from a courage and a knowing that at times surprises me but which allow me to confront my fears. I often wonder where this new found determination and wisdom has come. More and more we live in a climate of fear, at times promoted for political means to an end and at times to ensure control by external bodies (Church,

Government, and sadly at times even some personal and professional relationships) over our lives. Acting from a core of fear does not make us stronger or allow us to grow in confidence as people. Its detrimental impact can make us weaker and inhibit our clarity.

There was a time in my principalship that I was under considerable pressure to close one of the three campuses that made up the college. The pressure came from many people with a vested interest: the families, the governors, some of my own leadership team and even many staff who could see no reason why this non-viable campus should continue to drain resources from the more sustainable campuses.

Truth be known, I was probably of the same mind at first. Like many, I recognised that the bottom line was not healthy, that resources were being poured into a campus that was struggling in many ways. For example, numbers were down and some students and their families appeared not to align themselves with our core Marist values. In fact, some were openly rejecting what was to me a precious tradition and a valuable resource. It would not have been too hard to mount a convincing argument for its closure.

However, I found it increasingly difficult to show leadership on this issue. I was not at peace with any option! I was fearful of making the wrong decision; I was fearful of the backlash from families whichever decision I reached; I was fearful that I would be thought less of because smarter and

more important people, who knew what decision to take might disagree.

I struggled with language, direction and purpose and my community heard me vacillating. It is obvious to me now that I had allowed the agenda of others and my own fear of failure to influence my thinking. I seem to have forgotten that as an educator I have always felt called to work for the marginalised, motivated by the transformative power of education.

What I remember about that time was that I would often go to work in the morning feeling restless, worried and techy. Deep down I was ill at ease but when I finally allowed myself to be still, calm and quiet and to take the time to pray and listen, the decision came easily. The event that triggered this contemplation is a familiar scene for many of us in schools. I was meeting with the mother of a child that had been in trouble, probably for the umpteenth time. We felt we had put many support structures and programmes in place but we had seen little improvement in the child's behaviour. At the meeting, it struck me that the mother appeared dishevelled, distracted by her own health and financial worries and pleaded with us to give her child another chance. It became very clear to me, that what was driving this mother on that morning was more than her want for us to educate her child but her need to accompany her with her parenting. There was something in this mother's face that spoke to me of the 'Montagne' experience. Through her, I was starkly reminded that I was called to make Jesus known and loved, through every decision taken. The child's behaviours became a secondary concern.

That weekend, I was by the sea side sitting on a sand dune being entertained by my dog and felt suddenly clear of mind and purpose. I noticed an inner peace that I had not felt in months and felt strong and courageous in the decision I was about to take. I had accepted the hard road and

recognised God beside me, inviting me to take one step at a time and to not lose sight of the greater need of our students and their families. I knew my plan was no more financially viable than the current situation and I was still fearful but I was not driven by that. Suddenly I found the language to articulate what I had always known. As disciples of Jesus we were needed at this time and in this place. As Marist educators it is incumbent upon us to be people of hope and faith and to be the living witness of Jesus by making him known and loved – and not only to our students but their families and to our colleagues and friends. It was a profound moment in my leadership.

Being a disciple of Jesus calls us to seek the truth, to be truthful and authentic to ourselves and to those we serve. We are asked to be more generous, more compassionate, more forgiving and more courageous today, than we were yesterday.

When life tests our resilience and our resolve, and even when it does not, Jesus taught us to trust the work of God through and around us. Being a disciple of Jesus also means being 'people of listening hearts' - working, praying, sharing and living in community. How much simpler and richer life is, and how much more nourished do we feel when we share our vulnerabilities and connect with other disciples of Jesus.

Erica Pegover