

Encouragement Encouragement

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'CONTACT – LESS'

We live in a world where contact is guaranteed – or is it? We have every means of doing so. Whether we like it or not, we are presented with 'must have' gadgets which we are urged will make life better, easier, faster, and more efficient. We have mobile phones, e-mails, i-pad, X-boxes, televisions, fast cars and Bank cards, etc. etc. Clearly some of these have aided communication and are useful. Yet are they really a blessing? Are they really needed so that we become, what we are called to be, to each other – a joy, a presence. Sitting on a bus recently, I noticed that everyone was busy talking to someone on a phone. An almost fear, not to be in touch seemed to pervade – yet in the corner was a very sad elderly lady looking forlorn and alone. An exchange of smiles and the recognition of what was going on, a little comfort perhaps.

In many professions today communication skills are valued and emphasised. We are taught technique on how to listen and engage. How strange it is that these even have to be taught to everyone!

Yet we live in a world where mental health issues increase daily and especially among the young. We have one of the highest suicide rates among males in the world (Britain). We have elderly people who never have anyone to speak to for weeks on end. We have people from other lands who are not welcome – people grieving, people with a loss of identity, the list goes on.

We are now in the Easter season – a season of Joy. We are Resurrection people who have been bought back by Jesus' voluntary death on the Cross and into New Life with Him. His love for us was so astonishing that, as my parish priest said – 'made Him long to come to back to us, He wanted to see us again'. How beautiful this is. We all long for the company of good friends and family, especially when we have lost, or parted from them. One of the special Resurrection stories makes this very real. Mary Magdalene sees a gardener while looking for

Jesus. She does not recognise that the gardener – the one who prepared the good soil, is in fact Jesus until He calls her name – Mary – Names are very important, a way of identity and a recognition of worth. Yet the Lord said to her 'Do not touch Me' – better translated as 'Do not hold/cling on to Me'. There are many interpretations of this remark, some better than others, but what is certain is the qualifier, 'I have not yet ascended to My Father'. Jesus was reminding her that she would soon see Him return to Heaven and she would be without Him, so He was preparing her for this loss, knowing she was heartbroken and could be again. Indeed the remark was a telling understanding of His love for her and hers for Him. Then He blessed her with a call to spread the Good News of 'His Rising', a gift.

So we have to revisit and look again at the nature of 'contact'. We seem to be forever more and more 'fearful' of engaging with people and the more different from ourselves they are, the more fear-filled we become, building walls around ourselves and encouraging others to do so. Face to face contact is often seen as threatening and difficult. (This spills over into military aggression too – it is easier to kill, if not in face to face contact.) Not only do we distance ourselves from others, but to an extent, from God Himself. We place Him in a distant place, in churches which enclose Him, in attitudes that make Him unreal, even if we believe He exists.



Touch – one of our senses, is something that we shun. We like our own space and do not like any invasion of it. We all know the damage that is done to children who do not receive affection, hugs, kisses from parents or significant people. Yet somehow, we extend this withdrawal of touch to adults, as if it

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were less important.

Touch is an affirmation of presence. Whether it is a hug or embrace, or a touch of the hand, or a handshake, a hand on the shoulder, as appropriate, but all say... I know you are there joyful, sad, broken, frightened – and I am with you. Sometimes words cannot express this adequately.

What is remarkable about Jesus was just how much ‘touch’ played a part in His Mission – His way of communication and reaching people. This was twofold – touching and being touched by others. There are so many examples of this. To Jairus’ daughter He held out a hand to restore her to life. He touches the lepers and touches the eyes of the blind man. He sits and eats with the Apostles and distributes the bread and wine, His Body, at the Last Supper. He humbly washes their feet. He acknowledges and heals the woman with a haemorrhage who touches His cloak. He allows Mary to wash His feet with her hair, and the one who anoints His feet. He eats with many people. None of these demonstrate a ‘*social distance*’ and a withdrawal from the everyday need to make contact.

Perhaps significantly for this season and wondrously He **invites** the Apostles in their hiding place to touch Him, to verify that it was Himself and not a ghost, after He rose from the tomb. ‘Feel Me – I’m really here’. “Touch Me and see for yourselves” (Luke 24:39). Later, He invites Thomas to do the same.

If we are to follow the Master should we also not do this? We are often unsure how to help others or even incapable of doing so. Yet this simple inclusive act can restore and heal, support and encourage. We must also remember that Jesus who dwells within is ‘doing’ the touching of hearts and minds through us. As Jesus said conversely “Whatever you do to the least of My little ones, you do it to Me”.

May is also Mary’s month – She was a mother in the fullest sense and touch was her special gift. From the cradle to the grave she loved and touched Jesus. She carried and cared and she taught her Son to do the same.

Could we not do so for others? Touch heals and restores. If you cannot touch physically then touch comes by acts of tender kindness.

Resist the ‘contact-less’ age we live in for the future holds for us a contact with God Himself. *Alleluia!*

Halina Holman



Prayer Reflection

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand.

What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:

"The touch of the Master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
Much like the old violin.

But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand

The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

Extract from ‘The Auctioneer’ by Myra Brook-Welch

Pope Francis said...

“We can’t be a community, we can’t make peace, and we can’t do good without being close to people, the Pope stressed. Jesus could have just said to the leper, ‘You are healed’, but instead he reaches out his hand and touches him, becoming ‘unclean’ himself. This is the mystery of Jesus, the Pope continued, that he takes upon himself our uncleanness, our sin, our exclusion to become close to us.”

Rome 2015

Prayer Intention in May

Evangelisation;

That Christians in Africa, in imitation of the Merciful Jesus, may give prophetic witness to reconciliation, justice and peace.

Feasts in May

1st St. Joseph the Worker

2nd St. Athanasius, 3rd Ss. Philip and James

4th The English Martyrs

13th Our Lady of Fatima

20th St. Bernadine of Siena, 22nd St. Rita of Cascia

25th Ss. Gregory VII, Mary Magdalene de Pazzi
& Venerable Bede

26th St. Philip Neri

27th St. Augustine of Canterbury

28th The Ascension of the Lord

31st The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary