

Reflections on Bere Island

Katie Seal

Nine dispersed individuals came together at the beginning of our five-day retreat not quite knowing what to expect. At our sharing on the first evening, it became apparent that many were feeling disillusioned with faith, 'stormy' or just rather lost. What also



emerged was that we were all, in our different ways, searching – asking questions. In varying places emotionally, spiritually and in life generally, we came together. Most important perhaps to this togetherness was our practice of silent prayer three times a day. Sitting together in this unusual context – in front of a candle in a room on a far-away Island – we were physically present to one another. Bonded in 'trying'; each with our own struggles and

joys. This communion of presence felt like a way of deepening trust between us, such that we felt able to express our vulnerabilities during the other activities of the day. Indeed, we were able to laugh, cry, dance, and sing with each other. And in this, I and others found a deep caring and support. It is strengthening to know that there are other young people also seeking God in their lives. I hope that this group will be able to continue to meet to share contemplative prayer.

Patrick Mckearny

Bere Island? Well there weren't any bears, but that was the only disappointment really. It was an absolute privilege to spend time in such a beautiful place, with such wonderful company and in such a special way as on a meditation retreat.

I'd never been to Ireland before and was really struck by the landscape and the culture. There's an openness and a mysticism about both that made me feel



deeply alive and connected. Those we interacted with were so genuinely welcoming – I felt that simply by travelling we were already experiencing a series of profound interactions we wouldn't have had back home.

It was also pretty special to spend time with 8 other young people interested in contemplation. It's an extraordinary thing that I have so many peers who would want to do something as seemingly unexciting as meditation and prayer. But there are, and it was a real joy to be able to live in community with them for the small amount of time we did. It strengthened some old and deep relationships and was the catalyst for some new



ones too. The feeling of the whole community was full of a youthful energy that I gladly take back into my ordinary life.

It was also very special to have enough time away from any of my everyday concerns to be able to sit in prayer and meditation for an hour and a half a day. I rarely make the time to do so but it had, and always does have, a really deep effect on me. It is a way I recalibrate and sink down into the depth of my being, to rediscover the wellspring of Christ there.

Heather Leppard



special. The memories of our time together remain very close to me, and I hope that this was the first of many opportunities for us to gather for prayer and reflection.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to spend New Year on Bere Island with folk from Young and Contemplative. It's been great to discover a community, albeit a dispersed one, among whom I can truly be myself. I was amazed by how quickly we came together as a group, and the depth of friendship was wonderful. It was great to have the opportunity to spend time in silent prayer together and to eat together. The conversation was also a real highlight, and to be able to be open about deep topics was very

Philip Seal

I remember being taught in a Geography class at secondary school that when Mount Etna erupted nobody within sixty miles of the explosion could hear anything at all. The sound was just too loud. This might just be misremembered volcanic history, but it is a nice metaphor for how my own life as a young adult often feels. The experience of growing older isn't always filled with explosions, but it does often seem as though the action going on at the centre – which the Bere Island retreatants would probably all call the spiritual action – is something too powerful to be understood, too loud, or too pure, to be heard, even though it totally overwhelms the reality we encounter.

I feel a bit like that about Bere Island. A lot was going on within me on the retreat; a lot was changing and I knew I was learning many different things. But at the same time there wasn't an immediate sense of connection and revelation: I couldn't say I had learnt anything very concrete in any one moment on the retreat. It was as though seeds were being planted, and that I knew they were being planted, but that I didn't know quite which kind of seeds they were or what they would grow into.

Having returned home now, the fruits of the retreat are clearer to see. To have spent time with such clear-minded and open young adults gives me hope about just how much community can be shared amongst younger contemplatives. In moments where

communication breaks down with my peers in University life, I feel confident that there really is another kind of relationship we can aim for.



Hiranya Jayasinge

Over New Year, I was privileged to share a week of community and contemplation with 8 young adults. Despite a diversity of backgrounds, and spiritual journeys, we are linked by two factors: we are “Young and Contemplative”. The week was spent in the rugged beauty of Bere Island, a holy place. Our days were punctuated by Morning, Lunchtime and Evening meditation, sharing silence and the beauty of creation.

I wrote once of my experience in a Quaker Meeting, that silence stills the turmoil of the soul, like the rain falling through blocked drainpipes. All the silt and soot of everyday life drift to the bottom. A refreshing shower. Meditating in community

on Bere Island, something similar happened; all the stress of minor irritations, all the things that inevitably become irksome when different personalities and temperaments share space and work together, fell away in the presence of the mysterious Silence. Bonds fraught were healed; brothers bound together. The workings of the Holy Spirit.

Not only that, but Community didn’t lead to me becoming less myself (in a bid to keep everyone else happy and prevent conflicts); rather, buoyed by a sea of acceptance, I was able to be, to become, more myself as the week progressed. Community is about learning to live both truthfully and peacefully with those you have no natural connection with. Perhaps I had a natural connection with this group that meant I could be both truthful (about my own needs and the inconvenient habits of others) and live peacefully with them. Nevertheless, a glimpse into this world, what Community could look like, is encouraging.

John Main wrote a book called, “Community of Love”. I’ve not read it, but the title sums up a positive vision for Community: a place of acceptance and love, where people can



grow individually and together, becoming more themselves, becoming more united. Indeed, perhaps meditation, unique in the fact it allows for both aloneness and intimacy, belonging, facilitates it. An ideal perhaps, yet I found it true – if only for a brief moment – in Reality.

Jonathon Spoor

During the last few weeks I have been waiting for an opportune moment to reflect and write down some thoughts about my time spent on Bere Island. Truth be told I found this difficult, especially as much is the same since I've re-entered the real world. My life is still riddled with doubt, confusion, occasional frustration and, most of all, busyness! But despite there not having been a lot of concrete change, in a way *everything* has changed.

My time spent away from normal responsibilities helped me begin to learn the important lesson that the world carries on without me. My life often seems centered on what I'm doing and it can feel like this is of vital importance but maybe I should concentrate on how I'm present in what I'm doing. If people ask me what I did over New Year, once we get on to what I actually did they tend to sound a little taken aback. Being in beautiful scenery, being in silence and solitude and being around friends might not sound like much; but in encountering God through creation, with friends, and in silence, I've begun to know that I'm loved. That's where I think lasting change can start.

So you'll probably still find me stressed or worried, particularly when people ask me what I'm going to do with my life. Beneath this, though, I feel a peace beginning to grow from time shared with friends and time in silence. I often search for quick-fix or easy solutions to life's difficulties, but it's only in this time of being present that I've felt a sense of peace.