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Our Easter On Bere Island 2009

by Kasia Gabryel.

When I read Father Laurence's article about Easter and the Tridum Paschale on Bere Island, I was overwhelmed by a strong desire to share in this experience.

Bere Island, off Castletown Bere in County Cork Southern Ireland, is the island of Father Laurence's ancestors. His mother emigrated to England at the age of eighteen. And when as a boy Father Laurence visited the island, he not only fell in love with its raw beauty, but also began to discover his roots. In his introduction to his great book, 'Jesus- The Teacher Within', he writes very movingly about Bere Island.

In the beginning of 2009 it was announced that the Easter retreat on Bere Island would take place again. My wish was about to come true. I would be celebrate Easter on Bere island!

My whole Gabryel family, my husband Mike and daughters, Hanya and Aniela, landed on Irish soil. You see, thanks to the incompetence of Wizzair Airlines we were one day late. However, immediately on our arrival we were touched by the warmth and kindness of the Irish people- half of whom turned out to be Poles! We rented a car, and early on Holy Wednesday morning we were off to Bere island. Beautiful winding roads led us through the hilly country of Cork- covered by a golden carpet of gorse. We landed on Bere Island in the afternoon.

We were met by Pierre, our kind organizer, who immediately took us to our hostel in Admiral House. The meditation group staying there was multi cultural. We left our luggage there. We then went to the Bere Island Heritage Centre where the meditation sessions were taking place.

Each session of meditation was preceded by a talk from Father Laurence. From Holy Thursday morning the time was divided between meditation and the preparation for the Triduum. Each morning at 6.30 we meditated in the places where we were staying. In Admiral House there were about thirteen of us. One room was kept for silence. We meditated, read, and prayed there.

Before meditation we read liturgical texts prepared by Stefan Reynolds. His characteristically lean posture always appeared at 6.am in the kitchen. He confessed with longing and regret. ‘I would love to eat porridge but meditation comes first.’ I was ashamed as for me, it is green tea that comes first. I shall have to discuss this problem with Stefan!

After thirty minutes of morning meditation we had to eat breakfast, clean our rooms, and then go to meet Father Laurence and the rest of the group.

Although the road was a little steep and windy, many of us wanted to walk. However, this was never possible as the locals were always offering us lifts. Consequently, we were always on time for our sessions. One of these sessions was used to prepare us for Holy Thursday. Father Laurence discussed the theme of betrayal. He analysed the gospel of St John. The Christ was betrayed by both Judas and Peter. He pointed out the mysterious connection between betrayal and glory. For it is on Holy Thursday when glory shines; and Christ did not turn away from those who betrayed him. Christ shared in the suffering of his perpetrators when they realized what they had done. He pointed out that Jesus
is with us even in our wrong decisions. Father Laurence compared the Holy Thursday betrayal to the concept of meditation.

Meditation is the process of us realizing our own constant betrayals, and moreover, of us accepting ourselves with all our limitations. Despite ego-centric tendencies we feel accepted by God, valued, and united with him at all times.

Through the ceremony of the Washing of the Feet, we celebrated the Triduum in the small island church. We formed into groups of three or four and washed each other’s feet with humility and reverence. During other parts of the Tridum some of us read the holy gospel texts. Mike, my husband, played the organ, and I sang with the choir led by charming woman islanders. On Good Friday we said the Stations of the Cross. Texts prepared by Stefan were marked by simplicity and depth. The true and simple liturgical services of the Triduum created a sense of concentration and awareness. On Holy Saturday this awareness was joyful, and expectations were high.

Finally, at the end of all the celebrations we sang the hymn we’d been practicing the whole morning on Saturday,. By this singing we wanted to thank the island community for their warmth and hospitality. Later that Easter night, we celebrated with some of the islanders in their local pub. The happiness of the Resurrection was near!

At six o’ clock on Easter Sunday morning we all gathered on the hill by the old pagan ‘standing stone’ in the mystical center of Bere Island. In silence, enhanced by gospel readings, we waited for the sun to rise. Our spirituality was given a severe test. The sun did not want to appear. We waited and waited. We were absolutely frozen! Finally, the sun began to slowly rise golden between the hills. We then flung our arms around each other and cried . ‘ Happy Easter!’

However, the sacred goes hand in hand with the profane. We expressed this by inviting all the islanders to a Polish breakfast! Sixty eggs dyed in orange and blue, and Polish sausages, smuggled over on the plane, were quickly devoured. The atmosphere of Agape was fantastic! It created an unforgettable bond between us all.

Thank you so much - everyone - for making this Easter so special on Bere

Island.

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Retreats

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