

CHALLENGING TIMES AHEAD!

A personal reflection on embracing positive change in the coming months ahead.....By Brother Sean

Where is the Barefoot Galilean?

In September 2009, I made my final journey back to my native Ireland to say farewell to my clients, friends and family members before taking my solemn vow of enclosure on 8th December 2009. During the retreat day which I was asked to do in Co Wexford, a delegate came up to me looking shocked and deeply upset on a recent article in the local press which gave detailed accounts of the Catholic Church systematically abusing young children over many years. What I found most disturbing was embracing a real victim who was abused herself and instead of receiving loving support from her Church, she was castigated and sent to 'Coventry' for daring to expose the evil actions carried out on her by local clergy when she was a mere child. I felt totally inadequate and lost for words. All I could do was to hold this woman in my arms and say please know that **'it was not your fault but theirs.'** Eventually after many tears of release, a smile came which was worth winning the Irish Lotto. Since meeting this incredible and enormously brave soul, I have had many sleepless nights troubled by the many clients whom I have befriended who were victims of a wide range of abuse from the hands of the Catholic Church both in the UK and abroad.

Not wishing to get embroiled in suing the Catholic Church for what I was subjected to, I continue to have flash backs of repeated physical and psychological and emotional abuse at the hands of the ruthless and merciless Irish Christian Brothers at Drimnagh Castle in Dublin. This abuse was instigated as soon as the Superior, Brother Fahey, a burly 6 foot 6 ex footballer with hands like shovels, found out that I was not Irish. He was shocked to think that they had a foreigner in their school and boy did he relish using his double leather strap with coins inserted to give it weight when it landed its fatal blow on either your hands or backside minus your trousers. The yelps were heard for miles around the school yard. It would seem that they really vented their sexual frustrations by systematically caning and strapping whoever got in their way! No wonder I left school with no formal qualifications but well schooled in fear where physical and psychological abuse were the norm. I ask the question yet again, 'where was the Barefoot Galilean in that Christian Community of men?

Down through the years, having entered a male monastic community I became aware why the Irish Christian Brothers were like they were! The system was corrupt and laden with a fear mindset there was no love and certainly not Christ's love. I sense that many men were forced into the order as were many young girls. But despite all of the negativity encountered in one's monastic life, there were period of great joy and solace so often found in silence before exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on Wednesday and Sunday Evenings.

The Irish had a saying that you knew you had the hundredfold from God when, 'you had a son in the priesthood, a daughter a nun and pigs in the parlor!' I realize that when I finally made up my mind after 8 years living a miserable existence as a nursing monk where the lack of Christian Charity was denied one and where sacrifice was the norm. so many of our young monks departed in droves when we were in Novitiate House of Studies and we often wondered why that was? Sadly, the Novice Master or senior monk in charge of our training never did spill the beans that there were ruthless superiors who if they took an instant dislike to you, then you were singled out for continuous punishments and denial of privileges. Oh, what a time that was! I can well understand Brother Donatus and many other senior monks advising us to get out whilst we were still young and had a life ahead of us! Leaving the monastic life was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever had to make in my life. I was leaving a life that I found spiritually uplifting when I was left alone. When it came to signing my release papers, it was a painful experience as I denied the opportunity of saying goodbye to my fellow monks. The wrench left a gaping hole for many years as these were my friends in the whole wide world and now my life was meaningless without them. But the decision had to be made and I sensed that Jesus knew that whilst I had officially forsaken Him as a monastic, my heart could never be released from that spiritual relationship ever!

Since leaving the monastic life back in the spring of 1974, though bereft and adrift on a stormy seas of life, yet, I look back and clearly there was a guiding hand which prevented me from committing suicide for the way we were treated as God's chosen ones as monastic's. Religious politics almost destroyed my life but I guess I was fortunate in that my nursing career became a bolt hole where I could lose myself in rescuing others to appease my 'Catholic guilt,; where fear and religious persecution persisted for almost twenty years after my departure from the monastery. The Barefoot Galilean was given house room only whilst many monastic's continued to play a game of hide and seek with their true feelings. What is so distressing here is that within God's house, so many innocent and beautiful men and women who heard God's call to surrender their lives to His

service as monastic's, were soon to become slaves to a culture of subservient fear were dogma ruled their lives until their death. Apart from the occasional autobiographies written by a few of many thousands upon thousands who were needlessly driven from their convents and monasteries in life vows, they portray a picture like Dante's Inferno where there is no escape from relentless torture and abuse. Karen Armstrong in her wonderful portrayal of her life as a nun, 'Through the Narrow Gate,' here she describes her own personal encounter with difficult superiors who failed to accept that she had a physical illness which required help. Instead, when she vomited back her food, the clique of holy women would gather round to scrutinize her and with their superior they would start accusing Karen of being an attentive seeker who disregarded their holy rule of denial of self and offering everything up to God. In my novitiate, the saying that was repeatedly used to groom novices into submission was the dreaded Latin words, 'Agora Contra,' go against oneself, or risk the wrath of Almighty God! If and when a monastic left the community, it was common practice to carry on life as if that person never existed! The community would retort with their smug spiritual arrogance by saying, 'clearly, they were not meant for the life! Or, could it be that they were meant for the life but in their soul searching they found the burdens too great and were forced to challenge the 'Powers that be' begging them for change? Sadly, it would seem that change has come too late for too few.

Today, the Catholic Church along with the Christian Church is experiencing a serious decline in vocations to continue their charitable causes. Are you surprised? I'm not! I see the hand of God in this by allowing their numbers to decrease offering many of the Orders the golden opportunity to rethink their values and make positive changes. Sadly, there is a core element within each spiritual community who carry clout and whose voice always overrides the enthusiastic members seeking to implement change for the best. Many have entered the wilderness experience and having heard their heart summon them to return to following their Barefoot Galilean, their mindset rooted in centuries of fear and guilt has blocked the Spirit of God releasing their hearts to enter a new phase of lay monasticism. And yet, they remain continuous when they see how the Spirit of God is calling men and women to embrace a more relaxed way of spiritual living as lay monastic's without the religious drudgery and enslavement to religiosity and dogma; lives where love is nonexistent in their celebration of the Divine.

Against this background of sex scandals which has exposed a deep inner core of systemic evil within the rank and file of the established Church, the prayers of the ordinary faithful is heard and key players are sent by God to challenge the might of ruthless

oppressors acting in God's name. From what my family and clients tell me now about our beloved Mother Church back home in Ireland is really disappointing where it is only the elderly attend Sunday mass and very few, if any, young people ever attend their Church. They say that Religion no longer appeals because the messengers of God have alienated the laity from God through their abuse of power, lack of integrity and spiritual holiness now compromised by behaving dishonestly before God. Many now see the established Christian Church across the Western world having to face a major crisis of confidence for their betrayal of the innocents at the cost of safeguarding the reputation of a Church who has lost sight of their Barefoot Galilean's gift of selfless love. Today, that statement is now reflected not in the large numbers attending their local Churches but rather perceived in the low turnout of the faithful who are disillusioned and sense they have been betrayed by God's elected representatives from the Pope in Rome to the Archbishop of Canterbury across the wider community of believers.

It is not surprising that 'people power' has grown in strength by a collaborative effort from the victims themselves of the sex abuse scandals which have now spiraled almost out of control in the Catholic Christian Church. Their relentless tenacity and sheer will power has challenged the Church hierarchy to rethink their strategies of how they police priests who have or continue to abuse children in secrecy. Their determination to seek justice from their religious leaders has indeed been fraught at every level of enquiry but despite the devious and scurrilous means which were adopted by devious and scheming clerics trying to safeguard their image of respectability, have now been exposed in the Ryan's Report for all to see and thereby judge not on hearsay but on factual evidence which Rome tried to block for over fifty years.

In the face of such disturbing reading one has to reflect where is the Barefoot Galilean in all of this depravity and a Church which has alienated ordinary men and women from their loving God? Something which has never been heard of in the entire history of the Catholic Church is the concept of the Pope in Rome being arrested for condoning pedophiles within the Church. A solicitor went on national TV in the UK recently to say that if and when Pope Benedict does visit England, there is the likelihood that he may well be arrested by the police because a victim made an official report linking the Pope to their demise. It doesn't bear thinking that a spiritual leader such as the Pope could be arrested in this way but we shouldn't forget that 'God's ways are not our ways,' I know from personal experience that when I became seriously ill back in 1996 it took such a major breakdown to engender my spiritual breakthrough from living a life where appearances and ego were more important than honoring what God was actually trying to say to my heart! In truth, I recognize that

whilst I may have abandoned my God, my God never abandoned me! But to reach that place of safety back in the arms of my Beloved Lord Sananda Jesus, I had to undergo a deep pruning exercise regime in God's Fitness club! It wasn't easy nor was it as difficult as I had previously imagined!

In my heart I do believe that God has already prepared an exit strategy for the established Church to face their demons. But first, I believe that like the corrupt politicians who deceived their electorate re: public expenses, the Spirit of God will 'name and shame' clerics who have secretly hidden lies. The Church as we have known it must undergo a dramatic overhaul from the top to the bottom. Many casualties will be as a result and I know in my heart that what I am told by God in silence is true. Yes, the Catholic and other established Christian Churches will fall just like the finance companies that deceived their shareholders collapsed. But, I take heart because down through the centuries when the Church lost its way because of the hedonistic lifestyles of Popes and clergy, we were introduced to many great Holy Men and Women of God such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saints Claire, Colette, Bernadette, Margaret, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard von Bingen, Therese of Lisieux, Therese of Calcutta and Padre Pio to name but a few. Again, God sent the American black people who were struggling from white man's oppression the great Martin Luther King. In India we were introduced to the unstoppable and inspirational Gandhi whose philosophy changed the whole political arena. It is my heartfelt belief that in this corrupt century where politicians and clergy representing the wider Christian community have failed their peoples, God has a plan to restore balance, harmony and a safe return to spirituality and not a religion which enslaved many to spiritual impoverishment.

Sometime ago I was pleased to receive a telephone call from a disabled lady in Ireland late one evening. She said that she was guided to phone me and ask a specific question before singing the Celtic Blessing. The question she asked was, 'what is the difference between religion and spirituality?' Initially, I declined and was guided to let her share her thoughts. She said, 'religion is for those who live in fear of hell and spirituality is for those like the two of us who have come through a living hell!' I was dumb struck for words as here I found a completely different viewpoint which spoke volumes to my heart about my upbringing as a Catholic Christian on a diet of fear, self loathing, and guilt. Is this the Church Jesus had intended for everyone? My heart says definitely not but I ask why we were spoon fed on a diet of such negativity by men and women who had become the modern day equivalent of the Pharisees in the Gospels? The Early Christian Fathers and their successors have left us with a legacy not of love as demonstrated by Jesus, Magdalene and

Saint John but a life which has torn the very heart out of the *Gospels of Peace* by Jesus, the *Cosmic Christ*. This is not an attack on the Catholic Church but merely an observation based not on revenge or a vendetta to overthrow a family I still love. Rather, it is because my heart is thankful for the many blessings which I received -blessings which were to become my saving grace in taking back my power from a religious institution which has become more about upholding self image than embracing the simplicity of the Barefoot Galilean.

Today, many individuals have taken their power back from their religious families by adhering to the words from the *Great Saint Therese of Avila* who strongly recommended that if we are to see the face of God, then we must depart our religious family and begin the walk of faith. Instead of being shackled like a horse, we have the ideal opportunity to find God by embracing the Natural World-the Franciscan Soul of simplicity as demonstrated by the Barefoot Galilean. So, it is not surprising to discover that many individuals across the great interreligious faith communities through their weariness and frustrations with their religious family have taken a leap of faith and joined one of the many new spiritual communities which have resurfaced. Many have decided to become lay monastics not as monks or nuns but simply to live a simple spiritual life in their monasteries without walls. This is how we live as members of the Tau Interfaith Franciscans monastic community. In our availability and vulnerability we agree to dedicate our heart to God by embracing a non hierarchical community which empowers one to write one's own Rule of Life and follow it to the best of their ability. There are no imposed religious restrictions to become an Oblate or trainee monastic such as being of a certain age or sexuality. Each individual is encouraged to remain who they are as valued members of their local society but are encouraged to nurture their spiritual life by making efforts to attend their monthly support groups for ongoing support and healing.

Unlike my experience as a Catholic nursing monk, the rigors of living to a strict rule of life which began as soon as you were awakened at 5am until you retired at 9pm, your life was not your own to organize. When you joined, you surrendered your whole life to the community and you became their property. Very soon you would be reminded that instead of being a valued person or child of God, you became a number-a thing and definitely not a person who had the time to explore a loving relationship with one's God. Being a lay monastic member within the Tau Interfaith Franciscan Community, though I now live a simple life as that of an enclosed monk, I have more freedom to explore my personal belief which allows a closer intimacy than my counterparts in say, the established Christian monastic communities. They are not really free to be themselves whereas I am totally free

to plan my day and how I wish to be more creative in my interpretation of what my heart is guiding me to say and do in periods of prayer, etc. I am not forced to be in Chapel at specific times like my predecessors. By embracing the Natural World -the Franciscan Soul of Simplicity, I am living in the presence of God and my resident guest who shares 100% of my life is the Barefoot Galilean.

In my heart I know that when I finally gave into to my heart in December 2008 it was not to live a monastic life devoid of love, friendship or joy. In fact, what has happened since I entered the sacred contract of the **Hierus Gamus** or **Sacred Mystical Marriage with my Beloved Barefoot Galilean**, everything I need is already taken care of despite what the experts might say to prove me wrong! Though many authors write extensively about 'manifesting your abundance' suggesting that by doing specific things, saying long winded mantras, etc. you will get your wishes. What they are really doing here is misleading many souls in their understanding of Divine Abundance. They are leading many gullible individuals to part with large sums of money to buy into their courses which inevitably leads them up the garden path to a no entry sign which says, 'You have been fooled.' Divine Abundance is there for everyone and anyone who is willing to surrender their heart, their 'me syndrome' to God. This is not handing away your power or losing control of your destiny but is setting the heart free to receive a greater abundance which will feed the mind, body and soul in one's personal search for God. Yes, in my former life as a monk, I was expected to give up everything including severing all ties with my family. As you can well imagine, this did have a deeply negative impact on both my mental health and with family relationships when I eventually left the order back in 1974. My family couldn't relate with me because I was a complete stranger to my blood family as a direct result of religious mind reprogramming. In other words, the Church has institutionalized me as it had with many thousands of other young men and women who entered that style of monastic life in the Catholic Church. Monastic drop outs soon fell by the wayside and went on to develop crazy and bizarre lifestyles from living opposite lives to that of the monastery or convent. Like many of our young army and navy personnel who leave the forces, there are far too many who cannot cope with living in a non institutionalized society and usually end up experiencing problems of readjustment. To relieve their anxieties they nurture their addictive personalities and seek solitude in alcohol or drugs. In fact, many ends up living rough as drop outs on the streets or end up in a prison cell because they have been institutionalized. So too have many ex nuns and monks found life on the outside of their monastery walls a deceptive place where they lost everything including their belief in a God of love. How tragic is this that souls were sacrificed on the altars of an ego driven Church whose main concern wasn't

the care and total wellbeing of its members but rather how it would be seen if scandals were to get out.

In conclusion, one should ask the penultimate question, do we really need such a hierarchical structure where reputation matters more than the faith of its followers?

GK Chesterton said when he first caught sight of the Vatican, '**amidst this pomp and splendor, where do I find the Barefoot Galilean?** As with all established religion, the laity is the last to be officially consulted even protected from exploitation of greedy and egotistical clergy. The need to streamline the Church and strip it right down back to basics couldn't happen sooner. Society needs to take a lead here by acting responsibly instead of what happened in Catholic Ireland many centuries ago. One can fully understand that in light of a poorly uneducated people, it seemed the right thing to do to trust the clergy to act in their best interests only because they were learned and wise then. Since the 1960's, things have changed considerably and it is not only the clergy who are educated in matters of morals and religion but many young men and women are now studying degrees in theology without entering priesthood. Society today is better informed and with the onset of the internet as well as a renaissance in Holistic Energy Sciences, many practitioners have abandoned conventional religion for a more open spirituality which allows them freedom to explore their deity or God/desses. Surely this has to be a great step forward as we enter a more personal intimacy with one's God without the approval of the established Church.

Because of the way the established Church has controlled many lives in a fear mindset down through the centuries, there are many who, like me, are reticent about engaging with a group of individuals who report God's Word with such alacrity and tenacity on Sundays but sadly, in their personal lives there is little evidence of such a Godly commitment in how they care for each other and for the wider community struggling to cope with adversity on a daily basis. As Gandhi once said, 'I like your Christ but I do not like your Christians because they are not like your Christ.' It would seem that there is one rule for them and thousands more besides for the laity. Again, it is an assumption based more on a gut feeling that the reason why Mother Mary and many of the Ascended Masters including Lord Kutumi and Magdalene are appearing on a daily basis not to the established Church but to ordinary men and women who are living from their heart and who are reconnecting with the Divine.

At a time when the Catholic Church was about to implode on itself with the resurfacing of sexual allegations by priests in America, God sent A powerful Messenger to deliver a ray

of hope to the world. The message given by Lord Kutumi otherwise known as Saint Francis of Assisi to a group of twelve of my student therapists in July 2006 was a simple yet challenging message. Here, they were asked to **'restore all of God's people, empowering all faiths to live together in peace and harmony.'** This was an invitation not to segregate faiths but to unite as one to come and love the same Almighty God, known by many different names. So why would Saint Francis ask this of ordinary men and women when there was the might of the established Church Scholars and Theologians? Possibly the real reason was that in their innocence they would defer getting embroiled in religious politics and dogma and keep it simple! What came to light in 2009 was not only alarming and shocking but totally unexpected! In April 2006, Pope Benedict removed the Papal Seal of Vatican approval given to Assisi by the late Pope John Paul 11. Here Pope John Paul recognized the role Assisi had played since the early life of St. Francis dating back to the 12th century as a recognized centre for Interfaith unity and global peace. With immediate effect the present Pope of Rome placed the entire Franciscan Order in Assisi under the jurisdiction of two Bishops, not one Bishop, ordering them under their vow of obedience to Rome to close their interfaith centre and cease all discussions with the interreligious community. Was this God's will or man trying to play God?

The real challenge for all who believe in God today is not that we have to defend why we believe in God or which faith groups we belong too. What is essential is that we honor what our heart tells us to do instead of relying on an established Church to dictate a way of life that no longer resonates with the same Spirit of God residing within. This may sound confrontational and deeply distressing for our friends who still adhere to the traditional teachings of their Church. It is only when we honor God's inner voice within our hearts and act in accordance with God's will for our lives that we best serve our Highest Good which is that of God. Up until 2008, I religiously attended daily mass where I would actively participate in my local Church and do what I could to foster closer links with my religious faith family. Then one day, I was hit by what can only be described as a 'bolt of lightning.' My local Methodist Chapel were made aware by some gossip that I was not a practicing Christian and that I was advised not to run any more spiritual retreats for therapists and clients in their Chapel! I felt humiliated and angry towards the person/s behind these unfair allegations that I could not be a Christian if I believed in a person called Sananda Jesus and adhere to the teachings of the Essenes! In prayer, I was guided to let go and surrender my ego and pray for those behind the decision to ban me from the Methodist Chapel in our village. I was reminded of how Mother Theresa of Calcutta was given a similar cross to carry and then it became clear that Mother Theresa was refused help by her Archbishop to establish her order of nuns and left to flounder. But, here God had a

plan when a Hindu priest suggested to Mother Theresa that she could use his temple for her ministry. That small Hindu Temple was to become the very first clinic where Mother Theresa would welcome the sick and dying. The established Church in their refusal to offer practical help to this nun soon became God's ability to use a non Christian, a Hindu priest to provide the miracle. And God had a plan for Brother Sean to write to the elders of the Methodist chapel and simply remain dignified and not seek any form of revenge. The words of Jesus, **'if you are not made welcome then wipe the dust from your feet and depart leaving a blessing.'** This was what was done and though the Chapel continue to let non Christian groups use the chapel for their functions, etc, one is relieved to be set free from all forms of religious control. Clearly God had another plan and it was not to get too comfortable in any Church. Clearly, the aged members of this Christian family were more focused not on accepting new blood into their congregation but to insidiously implant their agenda that all new comers were to conform to their way of doing things!

Since my visit to the tomb of Saint Francis in Assisi back in 2008, that nugget of spiritual wisdom has empowered me to step aside from my Church family and begin a spiritual love affair with God by embracing the Natural World-the Franciscan Soul of Simplicity.

The only rule I live by is to be true to my own heart, to my own inner voice. My guru is within my heart.

It is my earnest belief that yes, we can really find the true Barefoot Galilean sat in reflective prayer alongside Buddha, Gandhi and Saint Francis with all the Celtic Saints in quiet reflective prayer living in the new faith communities who have departed from religion. Why? Because individuals whose hearts are fully open to God are receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit of change now blowing across God's beautiful universe. It is worth remembering that lay monasticism was not founded by clerics or monks! Rather, lay monasticism was originally established for lay men and women who didn't want the austerity of traditional monastic life. They were searching for the middle way without the guilt, fear and long hours of prayer and excessive fasting, etc.

Lord Kutumi, (Saint Francis) founded the Tau Interfaith Community of Saint Francis as an important vehicle whereby members from all faith traditions could come together in brotherly and sisterly love and together celebrate everything beautiful. A practical means of access is via the Natural World-the Franciscan Soul of Simplicity where God can be found in creation and the animal kingdom.

The dawn of the New Aquarius is fast approaching where a new surge of energies are already affecting the landscape, the animal kingdom as well as the entire universe.

Everything is now shifting upwards and heavenwards. We who are caught up in this whirlwind of positive change are now being invited by Lord Kutumi and Magdalene to release our baggage and embrace our Divine self. We are encouraged to do this by surrendering our hearts to Source. A new beginning or as Martin Luther King once put it, 'I have a Dream' yes, that dream is now a reality where all faiths are coming together to share their religious beliefs and traditions without having to compromise their heart or be indoctrinated against their will.

Like the ancient communities of Essenes 8000 years ago in Egypt, so too are we encouraged to be a part of something beautiful for God. Being a lay monastic of the Tau Interfaith Franciscans is an invitation not to change who you are but more about allowing the God of Love reenter your heart and change your mind sets to receive your Divine Abundance.

In your heart may I ask are if you are searching for personal intimacy with your God? Then why not consider being a member of our Interfaith Community of Oblates and live out your spiritual life without any change other than surrendering your heart back to Source.

Brother Sean

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