

A JOURNEY TO CONTENTMENT

1. A Little Faith

Have you ever just paused for a while to reflect on who you actually are and what your purpose in life is; well, I can honestly say that I have and doing so has changed my life forever.

As I embark on my own journey through life I begin to discover that contentment is the most difficult value to attain in life. It is attainable, but to maintain contentment requires patience, dedication and optimism, even when times reach the least rewarding! Deficiency in life is the reason why we strive for inconceivable prospects and colossal ambitions. The reason for our anxiety is not knowing what lies ahead and the reason for why people, such as myself, embark on a perilous journey to find that one missing piece in our lives! Embracing such anguish whilst searching endlessly for your vocation simply opens your eyes much wider and prompts you to reflect on who you think you are as well as encouraging you to make it clearer in your own head as to what you actually wish to achieve in life.

Have you ever had an experience where you are endlessly searching for a particular thing and you cannot seem to find it, although it has been conspicuously staring at you directly in the face? Well I have and endeavouring so thoroughly to discover one's possession somehow doesn't pay dividends! It is a bit like looking for a needle in a haystack. The more you look, the harder it is to find, although occasionally whilst searching, you begin to notice some signs. For instance, the needle begins to glisten from under the pile of hay, therefore making it more recognisable and easier to find. Fundamentally, searching for a vocational pathway does usually pay dividends if you allow fate / God to dictate slightly.

Fortunately though, many people do hold faith in God's decisions and consequently, begin to recognise and distinguish the significance of small incidents in life. They begin to realise that these significant events are God's influences, leading them ever closer to what they desire most!

2. A warm reception.

As I made the sister's acquaintance I couldn't help but to be completely overwhelmed by the refreshingly simplistic style of the interior of Ty Mam Duw. What was more, the sincere hospitality shown by the sister who met us made me feel even more comfortable and gave me the impression that this community emphasise acceptance and sincerity towards visitors such as ourselves.

Even though I was initially baffled by the conspicuously simplistic interior of the building it soon crossed my mind that this simplicity demonstrated the devotion of the community to issues such as poverty. It also subtly hints at the kind of lives the sisters lead and shows that the reliance on modern materialism is extremely futile. Their belief and faith in God, St Francis and St Clare has influenced the way in which they choose to lead their lives and how they actually strive for contentment in their lives.

When it was time for me to ask the sisters a number of sensitively structured questions, my initial impressions of the surrounding area were mixed. The slightly claustrophobic, organic feel of the room around me, with metal bars designating our seats from sister's seats was admittedly, extremely different from what I had conceived of beforehand. But as I gradually went through the procedure of asking questions to the two sisters, I soon found myself at ease with the environment and accustomed to the initially foreboding metal bars. Within minutes, this distraction began to gradually disappear, as the bars became invisible due to my genuine fascination with the sister's mesmerising life journeys! One sister's story captivated me very much.

This was the story of Sister Agatha.

From an early age Sr. Agatha wondered where fate would take her and what her purpose in life was. The desire to know more pushed Sr. Agatha in many directions and evoked a number of life ambitions. Originally Agatha wanted to become a self employed window cleaner but as she went through life she soon realised that her destiny lay somewhere else. A visit to St. Francis' chapel intrigued Sr. Agatha and this fascination with the most 'Christ like' saint is what has shaped Sr. Agatha's entire life, even though she didn't realise it at the start. The simplicity, graciousness, tolerance and the gratitude of St. Francis inspired Sr. Agatha, but it also fulfilled the value which Sr. Agatha now holds most dear in her life: contentment!

Her spiritual mentality as a child was not fully acknowledged. She grew up in an anti Catholic, anti religious environment. I suppose this made Sr. Agatha more determined to follow her dream, which after her awe inspiring visit to St Francis' chapel was utterly inevitable. She wanted to become a nun.

3. Contentment

Like many others, Sr. Agatha has fulfilled her dreams and found contentment now, as a religious sister.

She is currently a sister living in the Poor Clare community at Ty Mam Duw, Hawarden, North Wales. The community of twelve sisters work as one to help lift the burdens of people through their prayer. Alongside this lies their main priority; they believe they can find contentment with God through their relationship with Jesus and all that they learn from St Francis and St Clare. The spirit of these saints is found in the lives of each of the sisters in the community.

Little things in the lives of the sisters justify their dedication and faith in God. The enclosure for instance symbolises Jesus in the womb of Mary. Their sequentially planned daily mass and prayer sessions show just how faithful to God they actually are. All of these symbolic moments bring them closer to God, as well as the hope of eternal life. Saints Francis and Clare show the sisters the qualities they need to become better people; they are an inspiration.

For the final part of the visit, I was able to see the chapel and visitors rooms. As I made my way around the building I was honestly spellbound and perplexed by the wondrous pieces of art work on display. The intricacy, the ravishing colours and the sheer depth of the message within is a reflection of the sisters journeys to where they are today and indicates the creativity and unity in the community.

I wondered whether the sister's contentment was genuine or not. Oh, it was most certainly genuine!

Personally, my visit to the Poor Clare community has changed the way in which I think in many different ways. It turns out that the old cliché; 'Never judge a book by its cover', is totally true. The way in which different people choose to find contentment in their lives should be fully appreciated and especially respected by everyone. Whatever path you choose to take, contentment is always life's primary value. But it is how we chose to walk this path which separates us all. The sister's path demonstrates a level of focus and motivation which is hugely missing in the world today. For this, I admire them!

Joshua Cerefice.