

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: APRIL, 2016

Edward de Bono, one of the great gurus of our times, insists that the urgent will always take precedence over the important (*Future Positive*, 1980, pp. 227-228). In so saying, he may be thought to have outlined the virtually universal experience of those who work in schools, of those, in particular, who work in them as leaders. Diaries and agendas, *scéimeanna* and lesson-plans, notwithstanding, crises, big and small, can dictate what gets, and what holds, our attention in the course of any given school day. At times, including especially this last term of the school year, work in school can – to invoke the title of a John Masefield novel – seem to be just *ODTAA*, “one damned thing after another”, without rhyme or reason, beginning, middle or end, and principals especially may seem and feel like Chinese jugglers, racing up and down in an increasingly frantic effort to keep all the plates spinning on their respective poles (See YouTube). It is, of course, absolutely essential for the effectiveness of our schools as places of teaching and learning, as places, indeed, of Christian formation, that, the demands of the urgent notwithstanding, we make time for the important.

There is a wealth of literature arguing that, in any profession, teaching included, “reflective practice” (RP), “reflection for practice”, “reflection in practice” and “reflection on practice”, is hugely important. Though its value has been questioned in some more recent studies, RP is still the basis and/or the object of training – both pre- and in-service - and of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers across the globe.

It may well be that, in schools across the country, primary and post-primary, RP is top of no-one’s to-do list right now. There is, it may well be argued, simply too much to be done to justify teachers, in general, principals, in particular, making time for thinking! It does, though, bear emphasis that it is those teachers and those schools which, in whatever form and by whatever means, advocate and cultivate RP, even when – especially when - everyone is “up the walls”, which are more likely to negotiate these particular “rapids” most successfully.

In Catholic schools, RP must have a specifically faith-based dimension. For us who are committed to the service of youth for the sake of the Gospel, RP simply must include prayer, both individual and collective. Each of us must pause from time to time to reflect in the Light of Christ on what we are and on what we are about as Catholic teachers and we must do that for and by ourselves and also together as we collaborate to form the young in Christ. (If the idea of making space and time for prayer when we are busiest seems odd, maybe we have, right there, matter for reflection).

It was, in fact, when they were busiest that Christ bade his apostles: “‘Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest awhile’ (*Mark* 6:31)”. The Fathers interpreted this as an invitation to the Twelve to spend time in prayerful solitude with the Lord, to rest with him in contemplation after the exertions of action, to recuperate in body and in soul from their recent labours the better to face those to come. Time for reflection, time for prayer, is absolutely essential for all who work in Catholic schools, teachers, in general, principals, in particular. They must - as a matter of course but especially when under greatest pressure – make time to be alone with Christ, the only Teacher (cf. *Matthew* 23:10), whose yoke is easy, whose burden is light, who, when we labour and are overburdened, gives rest to our souls (cf. *Matthew* 11:28-30).

Is all this just pie-in-the-sky? Most emphatically not! It is, rather, Manna from heaven! It is *viaticum*, “food for the journey”, essential sustenance precisely when the going is tough and we are jaded!