

The Visit to West Cork, October 9-11th 2015

1. What was the most memorable experience for you – which experience stands out for you and what was most significant?

While walking up to the top of the peak overlooking Lough Hyne, my thoughts were about the names given to high places, people, and creations and particularly among the Gaelic-speaking people. I had read about how a re-constructed human proto-language might have translated words like “high, mighty, lordly, awe-some” i.e., an original sound in the throat of human beings that was reconstructed as “ul” or “ol” or “al”. I discussed this with Martin and Patrick. And I also thought about how many contemporary words from widely divergent cultures and places across the globe preserve this linguistic trace e.g., *alleluia*, *Alps*, *Kilimanjaro*, *Allegheny*, etc.

But this little syllable is also found, and can also mean ‘other’ as in e.g., *alien*, *alias*, *parallel* and, walking up that mountain, these thoughts definitely conveyed a directly numinous meaning. At the summit, I asked Martin questions about the *Gaeltacht* and the *Galltacht* – parallel terms in which the second describes the Anglo-Irish, who for the Celts were ‘the human other’.

Heights are always evocative and religious words which have this sound – *alleluia*, *altar*, *angelos*, etc. along with basic words in English e.g., *whole*, *heal*, *well*, *all*, reminded me that day that the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which we identify with God the Father, preserves the meaning of high and other. But I believe what a Jesuit once told me: the Father is mystery; the Son is Revelation; the Holy Spirit is love.

2. List some of the ‘God Moments’ of the weekend experience.

Seeing the whales up close was great. Particularly, watching the dolphins swim alongside the boat made me think of other kinds of intelligence going about their business but also, perhaps, they were glad of the company. Thereby I sensed a hint of the complementarity in creation.

While I was looking out over the inlet at Carbery, it reminded me of years previously, when I had looked out over the harbor at Cartagena, Spain, and when I had visited New Grange; there was the same sense of ancient history. In Carbery, I wondered about peoples who had walked these same hills millennia previously, and who had left their upright stones nearby at Drum Beg. At New Grange, where I had looked out of a 5,000-year-old window, it was a similar sensation: ancientness and long vanished human beings. In Cartagena, my thoughts drifted back to Hannibal’s arrival in Spain 2,000 years previously. I felt that what ragged Stone Age Celts, an armored Semitic warrior, and a middle-aged Canadian disciple might have in common could only be their Savior.

3. What are you taking with you from the weekend – what has affected your life?

I’ve always enjoyed reading about the Road to Emmaus as it reminds me of times where I felt my own heart ‘burning within’. The Ross Carbery talk, in which we were guided to see how Jesus’ ministry differed from that of all previous prophets, was instructive i.e., not only the selection of

disciples himself, but also the highly disparate characters and followers who would not likely have associated with one another otherwise. I hope to keep looking at the Novitiate through this lens.

4. So far, what are you hearing as you read *Laudato Si*? Make a link or connection between your experience and what Pope Francis is saying in his Encyclical.

The encyclical warns against western throwaway culture: 'The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth' (p. 18). In the cottages, I noticed that pop cans went into the garbage and during the walk, organic material was tossed to the side and yet here we were, walking past garbage on the path, and littering Ireland - notwithstanding the fact that none of us was even Irish. So there seemed to be a disconnect between the words we were mulling and our behavior. This made me think of Jesus' condemnation of people whose outside did not match their inside. *Laudato Si* criticizes all of us in several places for habits of 'wasting and discarding' (p. 21). So, the task was to sort and pick up. Or, put another way, not to walk by bursting with good intentions but contentedly oblivious.

The encyclical addresses water scarcity and, tangentially, ocean pollution e.g., the melting of the polar ice caps and acidification (p. 20). Looking out over the Atlantic reminded me of *Plastic Ocean*, a book which describes a Pacific clotted with kilometers of floating Styrofoam, garbage, and plastic, and sea birds dying of starvation because they swallowed it thinking it food. The plastic strewn over parts of the beach at Ross Carbery detracted from the beauty of the Atlantic and distracted me. So the task was to gather up the human detritus left on the beach. The encyclical urges me to become more conscious of my footprint, and this has to start with me.