

Journey Back St Paulinus March 1990

Entry was through the back door. The vista of the holy place opened up down the long, long isle of light. Catholics filled up from the back, so we journeyed down. The forward walk was filled with spring light from the high gothic lancet windows on the right. Inwardly I soared too, warmed with a strong sense of being home. I was stunned by the light, the brightness and the presence in the place.

We came again on Good Friday to a very full church and with relief we found a seat towards the back. Amongst all those local souls the stillness and the faith was palpable. For many it was a working day and they'd come straight from work in their blue collar clothes. I was touched by the veneration of the cross and watched and watched as the crowd moved forward intently. The dignity as they bowed, bent or knelt to kiss the head, the feet or the wounds of the Christ on the cross moved me. The faces of the men in work clothes as they walked the long isle back from the altar entered my heart. The faith, the sincerity, the no pretence struck deep within me. I was at home.

Through the 31 years since, one message shines out from the preaching and from the presence within the people :

God reaches out to us, searches out, opens out and draws in. Grace abounds in all things; music, art, landscape, flowers, trees, architecture, singing, poetry ... The word made flesh manifests its likeness in ALL creation. Epiphany comes in seeing people at prayer whose silent intent reveals a heart grasping the magnitude of the mystery. The head that bows at the name of Jesus, the half-hidden rosary beads swaying silently, the intensity at the taking of the bread of life, the child's acceptance, the eyes of the disabled person unable to speak yet clearly knowing fully the ungraspable truth....

We come again by appointment in these COVID-19 times. The visible and invisible presence of the faithful generations past and present permeates. We enter a place "where prayer has been valid" and where prayer is valid now. We are at home; "give us only your love and grace that is enough".