

He Always..

He always wanted to explain things, but no one cared..
so he drew.

Sometimes he just drew & it wasn't anything.
He wanted to carve it in stone or write it in the sky
He would lie out on the grass & look up in the sky
and it would be only the sky & the things inside him
that needed saying.

And it was after that that he drew the picture.
It was a beautiful picture.
He kept it under his pillow & would let no one see it.
And he would look at it every night & think about it.
And when it was dark & his eyes were closed he could see it still.
And it was all of him & he loved it.

When he started school he brought it with him,
Not to show anyone but just to have it with him like a friend.
It was funny about the school.
He sat in a square brown desk like all the other
square brown desks, & he thought it would be red.
And his room was a square, brown room like all the other rooms.
And it was tight & close
and stiff.

He hated to hold the pencil & the chalk, with his arm stiff
and his feet flat on the floor, stiff
with the teacher watching and watching.

The teacher came & spoke to him.
She told him to wear a tie like all the other boys.
He said he didn't like them & she said it didn't matter.

After that they drew.
And he drew all yellow & it was the way he felt about the morning.
And it was beautiful.

The teacher came & smiled at him.
"whats this?" she said.
"why don't you draw something like Ken's drawing?..
..isn't Ken's drawing beautiful?"
after that his mother bought him a tie & he always
drew aeroplanes & rocket ships like everyone else.

Welcome to our Home Retreat & thank you for choosing to join us, here & now, in this "sacrament of the present moment". I am Fr Bede, & it is a great joy to have been invited to walk with you today on this Retreat in which, together, we explore our on-going pilgrimage, our home-camino in these extraordinary times, with the young people in our lives & faith. For the last 20yrs, I have been

blessed to lead Retreats here & elsewhere with the young, as they you & I search for God "together"..& in this one word is our calling & our salvation..we journey to Christ in Christ & with Christ "together"..

For 12yrs when I was in full time ministry in retreat work, leading perhaps 40/45 retreats each year for students teachers governors diocesan priests religious sisters & parish groups, & the Catholic chaplains to the Armed Forces, I would work & pray alongside up to 55 students from Yr 7 to Yr 13, & University students, until 2012 when Fr Abbot appointed me Parish Priest here in the Village; since then I have led fewer retreats yet have the blessing of walking with our 63 young disciples in St Benedict's Primary School, & I would like this morning to offer you some grains of yeast from some of those many young disciples who have come here & brought Christ to us in their stories & their search for God..

..from written guidelines for our monastic life here at Ampleforth & for your monastic family life at home, each & all of us disciples of St Benedict, two short passages from his Rule put the context & your fingerprints, your footprints & your heartbeat into this exceptional day..

Ch 3 "calling the Community together for consultation"

"we have insisted that all the community should be summoned for such consultation, because it often happens that the Lord makes the best course clear to one of the youngest."

Ch 37 "care for the elderly & the young"

"human nature itself is drawn to tender concern for those in the two extremes of age & youth, but the authority of the Rule should reinforce this natural instinct. Their frailty should always be given consideration so that they should not be strictly bound to the provisions of the Rule in matters of diet. They should receive loving consideration & be allowed to anticipate the regular hours laid down for food & drink"

..we leave the young out of consultation in monastery & in your home at our peril. The poor lad in our poem just now wanted to be..different; tie-less, his drawings held in parity of esteem to Ken's, his free spirit acknowledged celebrated affirmed & grown on.."before I formed you in the womb I knew you; you are precious in my eyes & I love you; you are the apple of my eye; ask & you will always receive" words on a page in Scripture? or the voice of Our Lord himself spoken to each of us here & now?

"..speak Lord your servant is listening.." the still small voice spoken to us, & through us later today to our loved ones..

His poor teacher possibly well trained tutored by a mentor..whereas she first, & then by relationship, the boy, the nameless one, & Ken, & through them her colleagues, their fellow pupils, & their families at home, need to be nurtured. Fr Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk [a reformed Benedictine !] explains difference between a mentor & a nurturer. A mentor takes on an apprentice & trains them to become as good at the particular topic as the mentor themselves, whereas a nurturer takes on an apprentice & finds success achievement when their apprentice becomes even better artisan than the nurturer..true discipleship. When the sparkle like a diamond in their eye suddenly tells you the penny has dropped & you meet them 15yrs on & how proud & humbled you feel. Our calling is to be tender nurturers not critical mentors; "isn't Ken's drawing beautiful ?" "their frailty should always be given consideration"...perhaps no coincidence yesterday was the feast of the doubting Thomas..frail & struggling to reconcile all he was finding among group of disciples, frightened rabbits

in a locked & bolted upper room in lockdown, with all he at least had seen heard been convinced by in his relationship with Our Lord thus far, walked out on his own for a few hours, to breathe fresh air, to pray, & to listen to his nurturer heart to heart..& when he came back in, to an almighty dressing down from the sniffy ten who had seen “the Lord” & rubbed his nose in it for being out , Jesus appears again, 8days later, to give Thomas of all people the cream & the milk..to see, like the ten, but to touch into his pain & his flesh..a huge message for the ten “next time look after Thomas..& if/when you eventually make it to the gate of heaven as a ten, & I count up, I will ask you “where is Thomas..& vitally where is Judas?” ..

Pope Francis wrote wonderful address last year “Christus Vivit” “to young people & to the entire people of God” in one phrase he encapsulates essence of gospel & of life as a disciple of St Benedict; “may the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! & when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us.”

Cardinal Basil Hume wrote book “Searching for God” a fitting mission statement for many of our youngsters...some years ago young practising Catholic girl in Ireland wrote to her Parish Priest ..& copied it to a Catholic monthly journal; she said to him; “the Mass, the Eucharist, Jesus giving his life for you & me, this is as good as it gets..however, where is your passion ? where is the energy you gave your life for all those years ago?..not all of the time but some of the time, where is your passion?”

Our young disciples are convinced into belief & action by our example, of hearing of our struggles in life & faith, our stories of how we have been helped challenged & fostered as nurturers-in-the making. How we Pope Francis, Thomas, Judas..& hopefully you & I, if together we face our real selves each day, & specially today, need our young people to be patient with us !..how often we have expected demanded insisted on them learning patience, when they seek in us, & from us, our patience & our understanding towards them, our passion, & a full share in our story so far..a shared story of a shared journey..when was last time you had an Emmaus walk with a son daughter niece or grandson?..they don’t want from their teacher priest or parent a perfectly structured lesson in an academic subject, in a gospel teaching of scholarship & theology, or in the way of life insisted upon at home “as long as you live under our roof!” or in Church terms “Roma locuta, causa finite” Rome has spoken, the matter is closed” they want, they ache for, passionately need, real gospel stories of real discipleship in real life in July 2020..not from a text book, a theology tome, or the groundrules of home life, but from your heart..your experiences, for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, to have & to hold from this day forward.

They write on their hearts, from experience, their own gospel..evangelium..their good news to be announced heard believed & gifted to us for our own shared ongoing camino..the young & the elderly..rock & sand..together...the rock of stability dependability authority reliability tradition of the wise seniors , & the sand of flexibility adaptability risk movement adventure of the young..poor Matthew’s Jesus so Jewish affirms the rock & condemns the sand, when any structure built to last, to withstand tremor wind tsunami, has to have both..so too the Body of Christ we need young & old; sand & rock..parity of esteem interdependent supporting the structure itself, the superstructure of the Church, to build on & to adapt..in Covid & post-Covid.

Pope Francis speaks of “taking risks together”

“let us steer clear of young people who think that adults represent a meaningless past, & those adults who always think they know how young people should act. Instead, let us all climb aboard the

same canoe & together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit.”

He talks of the elderly helping to keep on course by reading the stars, while the young keep rowing imagining what lies ahead for them..& a phrase I share with my parishioners now again..it will say on side of the canoe..” Crew only, not licensed for passengers.”

Story of young boy skipping down his local high street..

my visit to York & meeting a lady on the pavement..

confirmation candidate from a parish in Leeds..

questions which emerge under cover of dormitory groups & confidentiality so identity is contained;

“why do you think the younger generation are embarrassed to admit they are close to God?”

“do you find that God is always there?”

“do you want to go to heaven to have a comfortable after-life?..or do you want to go to hell to help the sinners?”

“will God always be there?”

If I ask them about prayer & what it means to them;

“you can give your own opinion & there is no one to disagree with you”

“to ask God questions about his life & how he is doing”

“to know that God doesn’t laugh at you”

Some great phrases which emerge when their own truths gradually emerge as they realise they their teachers & me have created for each other a safe space;

“don’t worry, it will be better on Monday”

“the day I met Jesus”

“when it’s going well start worrying”

“teenage girls grow up too fast”

“we don’t all dance to the same beats”

“God is in the details”

“you can’t tell half the story & still be credible”

A question among many in School Hall in St Thomas More High School in North Shields, perhaps 200 vith form students, & one asked question I had never been asked before...“how would you feel if you die & find there is no God?” & here in Alban Roe House a car park question, one which warrants an hour of steady consideration;

“is there an unforgivable sin?”..& 58mins later with them doing most of the spiritual heartwork I ask them “so, is there an unforgivable sin?”..& they give me the answer! & what a wonderful glow emerges from them, to have found their own way into heaven & realised at last why very very few are self-excluded from everlasting life...& one on the inside is called St Judas, & don’t forget to tell your Headteacher when he asks you about the Retreat who you expect to meet in heaven... “& what’s the best bit about being a monk Fr Bede?” - “being able to spend 48hrs with all of you..when twelve other monks would love to be here in this chair”

Sixth form student & his grandfather...

Yr 11 boy student from St Bede's & St Joseph's College, Bradford

..last week I facilitated two retreats for St Bedes & St Josephs College Bradford; Mon to Wed Yr 11 girls 19 of them ; Wed to Friday Yr 11 boys 34 of them..girls had been before in Yr 9 so we knew each other..boys had never been to Ampleforth before.. there was some apprehension as to how they might respond..brought three of their very best staff "just in case Father..I knew it would be a good fight..as St Paul calls it "a good fight to the end" & at the end, at our final Mass on the Friday morning, they asked to read a reflection they had composed to summarise their experience..staff hadn't seen it beforehand nor me either..a chapter in their faith story, somewhere between the two book ends..I struggled with dilemma of sharing it with you or not ; however, the story the testimony, is theirs not mine, part of their mission to experience it & then want to tell of it.. I would like to share it with you ; however beforehand, I need to explain the final sentence..in some work in the retreat, they had written some personal phrases about themselves & their journey in faith..all following some profoundly deep question & answer sessions..one phrase which emerged from them was "Ampleforth is sick.." I was shocked by it, & with youngsters respecting honesty & authenticity, I responded by explaining we were indeed sick at the moment..I mentioned a few of the areas of our life & apostolate where we are sick ill & struggling..at end of session, one lad courageously explained that in their young peoples speak "sick" is a mark of congratulation meaning exceptional/ great..a new haircut can be sick..it was all good for my education into language & thinking of the young, celebrating the diversity we have in understanding behaviour & language.. ..our Catholicism at its best ; universal & all encompassing..challenging me to move further away from the Pharisee & closer to the tax collector..this is what they wrote & read..it is now on their College website..

When we were first presented with the opportunity of coming to Ampleforth everyone was interested in coming, although not fully for the right reasons. Most of us believed that it was an escape from tough lessons & preparations for the exams. It was a trip that we initially decided to go on so that we could just have a bit of fun & a laugh with the lads.

However, it became something that none of us expected it to be. Our retreat went from being a way to get out of school to something that has really meant so much to each & every one of us & will continue to have an effect on our lives in good times & bad.

We have learnt many life lessons from Fr Bede & we are eternally grateful for everything he has taught us, & for the experience we have had here at Ampleforth. From the way he has so honestly answered our questions, shared with us an insight into his life as a monk, challenged us to think from the heart rather than the head, & the stories he has told us of inspiring people he has met in his life..Fr Bede all we can say is that we have never met a man with a presence & honesty like yours. You are welcome to come to St Bede's anytime! Fr Bede we would like to say on behalf of everyone here that you are an extremely special man who we will never ever forget about. You have helped to set us on a path that hopefully will lead us to finding God & finding ourselves & who we truly are. Fr Bede because of you we have realised that it is ok to take off our masks, be comfortable with who we are, & take responsibility for what we do. We no longer feel right having the scapegoat mentality & for that we are thankful.

Ampleforth has nurtured a seed in us that will hopefully help us to grow in love with God & with those around us. Fr Bede is sick! & Ampleforth is sick!

At end of their academic year they invited me across to Bradford to celebrate Mass for the whole Year group, & afterwards our cohort gave me coffee & cakes..the College is some 35% muslim &

some who came on retreat were muslims..rock & sand together..& they all asked for another story before I left...told them of Trappist monk murdered in Algeria by muslim extremists 30yrs ago..his letter written to his family in UK when he knew his life was under threat..sealed envelope only to be opened in event of his death; three pages with last paragraph addressed to his would-be murderer; “& you my last minute friend, who would not have known what you were doing, I commend you to God, the father of us both, & may we meet again in heaven, happy good thieves.”

Shared with Yr 11 Muslim & Catholic students in Bradford..what a moment to share it as racial tensions tighten in Leicester& now in Bradford & Barnsley ; Popes two questions to Bishop of Nottingham at ad limina visit to Rome some years ago ; “how is the Church in Leicester?” & “how are your young people evangelising themselves?” the Pope had done his homework...“& are you going back to the Abbey now Fr Bede?” they asked as I left.

With the honesty authenticity they respect I said well actually no..I am going to Muragatroyds in Yeadon to have take out fish & chips in the car, then I am going on to Headingley to see my sister, who will want to know all about today & you, & then I will get back to the Abbey in time for Compline, & I will pray for you all there” let us think of each other at 815pm tonight please. Game set & match to the young bless them...& to those who wonder, out of a group of 55 Yr 13 students, how many go to Mass on a Sunday I wouldn’t embarass them by asking..four or five perhaps?..but sharing 48hrs with them, seeing them engage with their faith at depth knowledgable aware & searching, there is real practising Catholicism at its best believe me...so, moved by their 90min session of questions, I leave them with a challenge..would they, not their teachers, write to their Bishop, inviting him to come into their School on a day & time to suit him, & you put to him the questions you put to me, & it could be a life & faith changing moment for him & for your Diocese...& as we finish I would like to offer you a challenge.

If you have found this helpful encouraging & inspiring to know our faith is in such good young hearts & lives, would you like a Part 2 at some stage in the future, if Fr Kevin & his Hospitality team could arrange it?..much more to share if you have the appetite..do please let us know...you will find some resources for you to season into the rest of today..

Thank you for choosing to be with us, as you make this holy ground even holier by your online presence alongside us..

“O God, father of all mankind & source of true peace, help us to live in peace as one family, & keep us united in the bond of your love. Grant peace to all mankind so that we can live & share in your joy & tranquility, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St Benedict & St Alban Roe. Pray for us
St Bede & St Joseph. Pray for us.

“who do I say I am?”

to speak my own truth..who I know I am now..

...which three characteristics of “me” am I quietly proud of?

...which facet of my life do I bring to these few hours to ask for help with?

..in improving or coping or letting go of..

...how do I feel about being here just beginning these few hours?..at this stage of my pilgrimage from the empty tomb 2020?..in our exodus journey alongside our fellow disciples still in lockdown?..

..our families, particularly our youngsters & the elderly..

..colleagues companions friends..perhaps strangers..

...who do I ache for at "home"?

...in my Community?..in family relationship?..in school?..

...in friendships?..folk from my past..& beyond?

...in my wider family?..my parishioners current & elsewhere..

...who do I value (most) in family..in friendships...in my "community" ?

..who suffers because of the (most)?

...who is the thorn in my flesh?

...who have I lost touch with..by default..or by design..since last summer?

..is there sadness, pain , regret?

...how am I with God?...& how do I sense he is with me?

where do I hope to be (with myself) by the next 103 days [103 days since lockdown began..remember Barack Obamas "first 100 days" of presidency?..

(climb the winding staircase up to your little garret..attic)

how would you describe this innermost secret space within yourself?

does it feel peaceful or turbulent just now?

look around this room in your imagination..

when you reflect on what it contains, would you feel easy about inviting a close friend into it or not?

is there anything you would want to put away in a cupboard first?

do you share this room ever with another human being?

in your imagination, how does the atmosphere feel in this room?

..welcoming, reproachful, frightening, imprisoning or liberating?

..suffocating or life giving?

Fr Bede ; 4 July 2020

..some heartwork for you in your attic space in this quiet camino day ;

..what do you love, like, find inspiring about being in the company of young people today?

..what is a struggle ?

..what effect does the struggle have on you?

..after today's quiet day, what would you like your young people to know about you, & your future commitment to them? & your hopes from them in helping you?

..the most terrible poverty is loneliness & the feeling of being unloved..

..the biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis but rather the feeling of being unwanted..

..there is more hunger in the world for love & appreciation than bread..

..we ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean but the ocean would be less because of that missing drop..

..no I wouldn't touch a leper for a thousand pounds yet I willingly cure him for the love of God..

..when we die & it comes for God to judge he won't ask how many good things have you done in your life? But how much love did you put into what you did?..

[Mother Teresa of Calcutta]

"it was one of those university weekend workshop situations where I would meet a group Friday night, work with them all day Saturday, and close the session before lunch on Sunday. It was a heavy schedule for all of us, but the idea was to leave the members of the course with enough material for them to process on their own after I left. These people would be together for the rest of the semester. What they learned would affect their relationships together for weeks to come.

That day I had gone back to the classroom early after lunch to lay out the papers and overheads for the Saturday afternoon session. I could see someone waiting at the conference room door at the far end of the hallway, plastic bag in hand, as I arrived. He was a huge, hairy fellow with torn off shorts, a big barrel chest, and a t shirt just small enough to prove it. "didn't you go to lunch?" I asked him when I got to the doorway.

"I picked up a sandwich" he said and then went rushing on before I could ruin the day with more small talk. "I wanted to come back early because I need to ask you something," he said.

"sure, anything." I said. "what do you want to know?" he raised the shopping bag up in front of me. "first open this," he said. The bag was lighter than I had expected.

"what is it?" I said. There was something curled up on a rod inside it wrapped in an outer layer of plastic.

"take it out..look at it." He said. I realised that he was watching me, hard. He was searching every muscle in my face. I moved to a desk, put my own briefcase down, and cleared an area where I could unroll the material on the rod to the full.

"John, this is gorgeous," I said. The piece of needlepoint, half finished, was a medieval pattern, the kind that hung on castle walls, tight bright and intricate. "wherever did you get it?" I asked him. "I made it." he said.

"you made it?" I said with an incredulity in my voice that I have regretted ever since."where did you learn to do such things?"

"my grandmother taught me when I was nine years old"he said "I've been doing it ever since." He paused for a moment, "but no one..no one..knows."

He looked hard at me again.

"after what you said this morning, I began to think about things. I decided that I don't want to hide anymore. But I need your help. I'm afraid to do this," he said, and I saw a mist settle over his eyes.

“what are you afraid of, and what can I do to help you?” I said softly, beginning to feel a little misty eyed myself.

“I want to sit in the front seat and work on this hanging while you teach” the huge boy-man said. “you see, if you’re talking about this stuff while I’m working, maybe nobody will laugh.”

Believe me, I learned a great deal more that day than I taught.”

[Vulnerability & Strength ..from Heart of Flesh ; Joan Chittister OSB]

It wasn't like the ones we have today
but it was its first century equivalent
and it is in this context
that we see Jesus
at the end of the evening
get up from that table
& spend time with each person here..
washing their feet
kissing their feet
anointing their feet..
here was an expression of love
so profound
that we cannot even imagine it..

if there is a holy moment in Jesus' life
to which we can point & say,
“this is when he founded the church.
this is when he instituted the sacraments,”
it was when he washed their feet..
we keep looking through the scriptures
looking for a time
when Jesus might have given
his followers some new authority
& we want to point to that
& call it
the founding of the church..

but read carefully
it was when he washed their feet
that he founded his church..

this is the apostles real baptism
this is their healing
their reconciliation
their call to ministry.
this is, most importantly,
their eucharist.
this is for John & for us,

the moment where the body of Christ
is embraced,
shared,
broken.

the intimate love-making among them
replaces for John
any words of institution.

the line,
“this is my body,”
is omitted in this gospel

the only reference
is to this body of Christ
in love & service.

..there is a question which haunts me
concerning the majority of the people
on this planet ;

the ones who suffer hunger & thirst;
those imprisoned, killed & tortured ;
those excluded, ridiculed, abused, & mistreated;

who will wash their feet today?
who will be willing to pay that awful price?

[Rethinking the Sacraments ; Bill Heubsch]

“..we have to survive a twenty four hour scrutiny in which will be weighed our honesty & integrity, our clarity of vision together with our competence in implementing it in practice, and on an interpersonal level, our approachability affability, and capacity for two way communication. Only if we have attained an acceptable level in all these areas will trust be forthcoming. We have to earn trust, and it seems the only way we can do this, especially if we are in the front line of formation, is to live at a level of energy & passion much higher than that with which we would otherwise be content. ..by being what we are called to be, we give newcomers an inkling of what they can become if they continue to pursue the monastic ideal.’

“..there is a certain beauty that is a consequence of spending most of ones life in a single pursuit, attached to one place, and living with the same people. We are at liberty to be ourselves, no longer hiding behind facades or masks. Yet this self is more than the fleeting persona of this present moment; it is a self that stretches expansively over many years & decades, full of seeming contradictions & subject to so many vicissitudes. We are surrounded by so many memories of times past, of people now in heaven, of projects completed or left undone, of trees planted, of griefs & joys. As we pass through the monastery & listen to the echoes embedded in its walls, the refrain we hear is “this is your life”

..because of these voices we are compelled to live at a higher level of truthfulness, since we cannot escape from what we have been & still are. A strong sense of continuity develops , & a deeper sense of acceptance. This is where I belong. This is my home. Here I live; here I will die.

..this is the journey God has called me to make..”

[Strangers to the City; Michael Casey]

Novels & movies, being restlessly modern,
propel you forwards or backwards through time,
through days, years or even generations.
But to do its noticing & judging,
poetry balances itself on the pinprick of the moment.
Slowing down, stopping yourself completely,
to read & understand a poem
is like trying to aquire an old fashioned skill
like drystone walling or trout tickling.

There are these rare moments when musicians
together touch something sweeter than they've
ever found before in rehearsals or performances,
beyond the mere collaborative or technically proficient,
where their expression becomes as easy & graceful
as friendship or love.
This is when they give us a glimpse of what we might be,
of our best selves,
& of an impossible world
in which you give everything you have to others,
but lose nothing of yourself..
only in music, & only on rare occasions,
does the curtain actually lift on this dream of community.

[Ian McEwan ; Saturday]

“may your new work excite your heart,
kindle in your mind a creativity
to journey beyond the old limits
of all that has become wearisome.

may this work challenge you towards
new frontiers that will emerge
as you begin to approach them,
calling forth from you the full force
& depth of your undiscovered gifts.

may the work fit the rhythms of your soul,
enabling you to draw from the invisible
new ideas & a vision that will inspire.

remember to be kind
to those who work for you,
endeavour to remain aware
of the quiet world
that lives behind each face.

be fair in your expectations,
compassionate in your criticism,
may you have the grace of encouragement
to awaken the gift in the other's heart,
building in them the confidence
to follow the call of the gift.

may you come to know that work
which emerges from the mind of love
will have beauty & form.

may this new work be worthy
of the energy of your heart
& the light of your thought.

may your work assume
a proper space in your life;
instead of owning or using you,
may it challenge & refine you,
bringing you every day further
into the wonder of your heart."

[John O'Donohue]

"in out-of-the-way places of the heart,
where your thoughts never think to wander,
this beginning has been quietly forming,
waiting until you were ready to emerge.

for a long time it has watched your desire,
feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
noticing how you willed yourself on,
still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

it watched you play with the seduction of safety
& the grey promises that sameness whispered,
heard the waves of turmoil rise & relent,
wondered would you always live like this.

then the delight, when your courage kindled,
& out you stepped onto new ground,
your eyes young again with energy & dream,
a path of plenitude opening before you.

though your destination is not yet clear

you can trust the promise of this opening ;
unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
that is at one with your life's desire.

awaken your spirit to adventure ;
hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk ;
soon you will be home in a new rhythm
for your soul senses the world that awaits you.

[for a new beginning ; John O'Donohue]