

August 5, 2012

OUT OF IRELAND...

These last Sundays the Scriptures have been about feeding the hungry. In Ireland, our spirits have been fed by green beauty, music, story telling and companionship. The following reflections share a bit of that. At the conclusion of that, I have written a poem which I hope links the Scriptures, the Irish famine experience, and our own time.

"We are all pilgrims...And wayfarers
With too little time
To gladden the hearts of those who travel
The way with us."

What do you get when you mix up an Irish folklorist, a lovely 16 year old Appalachian folk singer, a 80 year old Catholic priest, a Jewish surgeon, a woman pilot, and 16 other folks just as diverse? Confusion? No! Harmony! And the universal language of music.

That has been our marvelous experience as we toured the west coast of Ireland led by the Multi talented Mick Moloney who brought in every night great local Irish musicians to entertain us. Not only that but we had in our own crew 5 Appalachian musicians who were frosting on the cake. Hospitality often refers to home but it can be offered in transit too. It means making room for the stranger and on our journey the hospitality we experienced from one another was extraordinary!

We began as strangers. We departed as comrades.

Holy Erin is a holy land with its holy wells and holy mountains like Brighid's Well and Mount Brandon which bring to mind all the ancient Celtic holy ones who drank from them and trod upon them. One day Mick, in a jocular way, said to me, "and how's the holy man?"

"Who me?"...No, not me. But it got me thinking about the words holy, whole, hole, whole hearted, and full hearted, all related in one way or another. A hole is an empty spot and we all have our empty spots, don't we? We are kind of like Swiss cheese or maybe like rutted roads that need filling in. Maybe becoming holy means becoming more whole...a task of a lifetime. As I thought of Mick who greeted me jocularly as "the holy man" how I have seen him about once every 5 years and can observe him in each 5 year snapshot to be a little more whole each time. What about our friends? Perhaps we may miss this growth when we see them every day? And then there is a paradox about wholeness and becoming holy.

As we grow, we fill up our hollow spaces. And in doing so, we become fulfilled. BUT here is the paradox...we are never really fulfilled until we empty our fullness.

Music filled artists pouring out music, poetry, and story are not only making our lives more full, but they in turn become more fulfilled themselves. What a blessing it was to be their companions on our journey!

On our last day, we met and were entertained by Dawn Doherty an All Ireland Champion flutist. Not only did she play brilliantly for us, she invited all us 21 to her home for tea!
"But we are 21? Do you have 21 cups?"

"Ah sure, I have 23!" So off we went to her kitchen for tea where not only tea was poured out but also Appalachian hill country music to accompany her flute...a Tea and Jam Session! And then this vibrant young colleen told of her day work...music therapy for the disabled or disadvantaged.

We are never completely fulfilled until we share our fullness!

We also were entertained by the brilliant Mulcahey sisters who spend some of their time with orphans in Vietnam.

Approaching Westport, our departure port, we stopped at Crough Patrick where every year on the last Sunday of July pilgrims come to climb the holy mountain, a trek that may go back 4000 years to when Druids climbed at the solstice to honor the Sun God! In Christian times it morphed into honor for St. Patrick.

This was a special moment for me because it was exactly 39 years ago to the day that my college friend Larry Dorsey and I made the climb at midnight. A watershed event in my life. Years later we would be co-pastors at St. Gerald. And a year after I retired on the eve of St. Patrick Day, while planning his annual Paddy's Day party, the angels came and took him away.

I dedicated the Celtic Prayer book to Larry with these words...

"He has climbed Crough Patrick,
And now he can see farther than any of us can dream!"

I remembered my friend Larry in prayer once again at the holy mountain he had once encouraged me to climb.

Our journey...took us through beauty and history.
Vacation...a time to be light hearted..to experience another culture BUT we can also be enriched by glimpsing the dark moments of history and of our own times.

One of our stops on Black Water inlet found us next to roiling waters alongside a desolate abandoned 19th century path. The only sound there, a moaning wind.

In 1865, bedraggled starving humans, having been refused food at a prosperous manor house, dropped to die along the way.

They were victims of the famine and a colonizing empire in London who replied to their cries for aid with, "It is not the government's role!"

This attitude seems to have an echo in our own day as government subsidies for food stamps are reduced while the need for them increases in the USA. This will amount to 16.5 billion dollars over the decade!

The Irish have not forgotten the hungry of the world today, nor their own famine. As I write this, a high Irish government official is in Somalia overseeing Irish food aid being distributed there.

The scriptures recently told us of Jesus feeding the 5000. As his followers, we can do no less. In the light of these scriptures on the "Famine Road" in Ireland, I composed this poem:

The Famine and our Deficit Road

Their trail parallels our road
Every road
1865 their famine trek
A trail of sighs
A path of moans.

They knock at manor door
Shuttered windows
Muffled laughter
From tables laden
With mutton and mead.

Ravaged faces,
Haunted eyes
They turn away
The road kill
Of neglect and scorn.

Today, parallel roads
Not famine, but hunger
On back roads and bayous
The American Dream
Deferred, detoured.

Sixteen and one half
Billion cut food stamps
Let the hungry feed themselves.
1865-2012
Old story, parallel roads.

No deficit in bullets, bombs
The milk of human kindness
Runs thin in favored land
The deepest deficit
Shrunken hearts, empty spirits.

...Thanks to my friend Donna Hepperman who
began my birthday celebration in Ireland!

..To friends who wish to buy my books,
Email me at fatherfitz@hotmail.com
For signed copies and friends' discount.
Go to Books and CD tab on my website.