

Chester Cursillo

Winter Magazine 2024

Winter now your soul. Make good of the
cold.

Do not carry on as normal—
as though the long nights were not telling
you

to fold into your roots, to quit your
reaching,
to clear your schedule and curl into a
ritual
of hushening ease.

Winter now your soul. Make good of the
cold.

There is no use in clinging on—
let yourself let go; settle into deep sighs
under thick blankets, the candles
summoning
dulcet shadows on the wall.

Empty is not devoid: it is the space to
breathe,
the hollow for the seed, the sanctuary
in which you can slowly regather yourself.

©Gideon Heugh, Naming God

Hi Everyone,

I'm feeling a bit stressed this month because, as I write this, we are in the middle of having our kitchen and connected rooms renovated. So far, I have had to manage for 3 weeks without a proper kitchen and no washing machine or dryer!

I'm starting to feel the frustration and although I can see the end getting nearer, I'm beginning to be impatient for the return to normal living.

But I am thankful, because I know that by Christmas I will have a beautiful new kitchen, breakfast room and utility. I will be patient and grateful. How much more must people in Ukraine, Gaza and Israel long for the return to normal living with no end in sight. Let us all spare a thought this Advent for those who are still waiting, still hoping, for an end to their pain and suffering. Let us pray that the joyous arrival of the babe in Bethlehem will bring them some comfort and encouragement in their time of darkness.

In our world today, we could be forgiven for thinking that Christmas time has already arrived! Advent calendars full of chocolates or little gifts; parties and celebrations; all that the 'bling' that a secular Christmas involves. But I think we need this period of waiting and preparation, because it is only by going through the frustration and anticipation of the long wait that we can truly enjoy the full wonder of the Christmas miracle.

I wish you a peaceful Adventide, a joyous Christmas and a hope filled New Year!

Love and Blessings

Bev x

Light in the Darkness

I've got a complaint! I have a favourite childhood-memory song, the words of which have been changed by modern editors! It's "Give me oil in my lamp." The last line of every verse ended "till the break of day", but modern books, especially those used in schools, have "till the end of day." And I have 2 objections, one minor and one major. The minor one is that the change makes nonsense of the first verse (Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning); now, you burn your lamp in the dark, not the light!

But here is the major one. The song springs out of the experience of African slavery; it was originally sung by slaves, praying that God would keep them faithful to Him through their dark times of cruelty and hardship at the hands of their owners - until that glorious day when the "sweet chariot" would swing low, and take them to the peace and glory of God's near presence.

So, this isn't a sugary-sweet song for our own joyfulness and well-being as long as we live; rather, it is a cry from the heart to God for grace and strength to love, to forgive, to seek and to bear fruitful witness through the darkness of injustice and suffering.

And so, it is a great song, I think, for the Advent and Christmas seasons in 2024/5. These seasons are all about light in the darkness - Advent is about waiting in the dark, yearning for the light; and Christmas is about celebrating the coming in humility of the Light into the darkness. Yearning, promise and fulfilment....a light that cannot be overcome.

This year has been a particularly difficult year in which to be optimistic about the future of this world: the continued, well-documented and escalating violence in Ukraine, Gaza and Lebanon; the evidence of an accelerating environmental crisis, and our inability to grasp the nettle; standard-of-living crises leading to the rise of isolationist and xenophobic political parties.

But like the African slaves, we pray with confidence for the faith to believe that the best is yet to come - for us personally, and for this world. Night will pass, and the Day will break - the Day of the Lord. The Light of the World, whose brightness cannot be overcome, will establish his Kingdom. And for us personally, we remember St. Paul's faith: "...This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." May God keep us burning till the break of day!

Tony Rablen

The Fourth Day Community swung into action to provide Palanca for Weekend #65 at Foxhill, which was a pleasure to do; such an opportunity to help fellow Christians to 'know Christ better' as it says on our Group Reunion cards. It was also a pleasure to see the Chapel at Foxhill so full of Fourth Day Community Cursillistas, both old and new, from Chester Diocese and from Lichfield.

I can tell you that the participants from Nantwich have returned to their Group Reunions feeling they understand the context more now, as Lynne Hurst explained to me. The two who were newly interested in Cursillo are about to join Group Reunions and are full of enthusiasm.

So who are the 'Fourth Day'? We're the Servant Community of Cursillo, there to help each other grow and flourish in the love of God. These are our groups in Chester and in Lichfield Diocese.

Cursillo Fourth Day Communities 2024:

Chester- 5 Communities

Macclesfield and Bollington- Lay Rector Bev Nixon

Crewe- Lay Rector Anne Marshall

Stockport- Lay Rector Ruth Arthur

North Cheshire- Lay Rectors Joan Clare and Beryl Smith. This Community meets largely online via Zoom. They kindly said they would welcome any Cursillistas from the Knutsford 4DC after Pat and Lew Riches 'retired'. We hold Pat and Lew in our hearts and we have long experienced that it is deep in theirs. God bless them.

Nantwich- Lay Rector Sue Hutt

**Lichfield - 2 Communities
Lay Rector- Revd. Jill Cooper**

We Fourth Day Cursillistas have many opportunities to get together across the Diocese during the year.

We hold three Diocesan Ultreyas, there is one National Ultreya at the end of August/beginning of September and of course,

lovely extras such as the Advent Retreat Day led by Revd. Canon Veronica Hydon at St Paul's Macclesfield on December 7th

Lichfield are holding an intriguing 'Spa Day for the Soul' at Shallowford House Staffordshire on Sat Jan 25th 2025.

Another date for your diary is April 5th 2025. Chester Diocese will hold an inspirational day at Foxhill, 'Cursillo Revisited' which includes refreshments throughout the day and a two-course lunch for £35.70.

**Look out for opportunities to get together; we bloom where we are planted AND blossom together!
ULTREYA, Sue H**

Lichfield Cursillo January 2025 Retreat

Including the Cursillo Spa Day for the Soul

**Weekend: Friday 5.00pm to Sunday 2.00pm
Day: Saturday 25th January 9.30am - 4.00pm**

Come and join us for a day of spiritual refreshment at Shallowford House, Shallowford, Stone ST15 ONZ. The only water involved is the Water of Life!

We will be revisiting the Cursillo talks "Ideal" and "Grace" on Saturday as we reflect on the goodness of God, what He has done for us and what He offers to us.

There will be optional meditation times and time to walk or sit in the beautiful grounds

Meals and refreshments are provided and Saturday will include a short Communion service.

Booking forms for the weekend need to be returned by Monday 23rd December.

After that, if there are rooms available, there will be the possibility of booking for just one night.

Booking forms for the Saturday only need to be returned by the 10th January 2025.

The Camino de Santiago de Compostela - Carol Thayer

I have wanted to walk the Camino since I did my Cursillo weekend nearly 30 years ago so when St Luke's Hospice announced their fundraising trek I was very excited. I trained and fundraised throughout the year and was supported by friends and family. Leaving St Luke's Hospice in Winsford very early on Saturday 26th October we flew from Gatwick to Santiago in Northern Spain and then travelled just over an hour by coach to Sarrio, a journey which would take us 5 days in reverse on foot! There are 5 Caminos or ways to Santiago recognised as pilgrim routes and qualifying for the coveted Compostela Certificate, we were walking the final section of the French way, the oldest and most popular route.

After a good nights rest we set out on our pilgrimage with our passports firmly in our grasp. Not the passport that gets you into foreign countries but the kind that you use to collect your stamps or 'Sello' that show you have walked the desired 100km to achieve your Compostela certificate, a traditional religious certificate printed in Latin issued by the Church in Santiago to pilgrims.

The Camino is a very personal journey for each 'Peregrino', walked as an act of penance, a spiritual exploration or simply as an adventure. I soon realised as we walked and shared the journey of strangers on the way, whatever their reason at the beginning of the walk, very few complete their Camino without having some sort of spiritual experience.

Each morning the day started with our guide giving us some tips for the day ahead, although the path is very clearly marked with yellow arrows and scallop shells thanks to Don Elías Valiña Sampedro there are in some areas, choices of perhaps more rugged paths or straighter easier(?) paths. We were also told about the meeting point at the end of the day then we left to walk at our own pace, surprisingly and sometimes miraculously we did all manage to arrive at the meeting point each day. Along the way there were bars, cafes, churches and sometimes just stalls at the side of the road offering refreshments and resting spots for weary legs and of course the all important Sello.



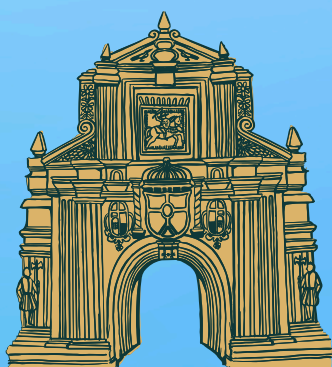
We were very fortunate to be housed in guest houses at the end of every day, with a nice soft bed, hot showers and only 2 to a room. Traditionally Pilgrims stay in Albergues, hostels provided specifically for walkers, they are owned by the council, religious groups or in private homes, the facilities are basic and you can be sharing a room with up to 100 people.

Our days varied in length between 18km to 29km, taking between 5 - 8 hours each day. The terrain varied along the way, we walked along country roads, forest tracks, gravel trails, and through woods and meadows, there were no farmers fields to negotiate so from that point of view it was easier than the Sandstone trail! There was quite a lot of walking on paved streets which is particularly hard on your feet and which I hadn't expected. The weather was dry (Thank you God!) But it was also unseasonably warm 28'c, I don't like to complain about the heat especially now as I'm writing this and it's -1'c outside, but it did make the walking harder.

I have been asked by many Cursillistas if I heard shouts of Ultreya! as we walked, well sorry to disappoint but No! I didn't, pilgrims say Buen Camino as they pass each other, by the end of the trip my group were responding Ultreya! but quietly. As we entered Santiago there are many signs asking pilgrims to respect the locals and not to sing or shout as they enter the town. That's not to say there weren't many shouts, cries and tears once in the square in front of the famous cathedral, in fact pilgrims are accompanied by a piper as they come through the final arch.

The Camino lived up to all my expectations and having done the final 115km, I would now like to go back and do the entire walk, maybe on one of the other routes (300-800km). I have many, many photos which I'd be happy to share.

Ultreya!



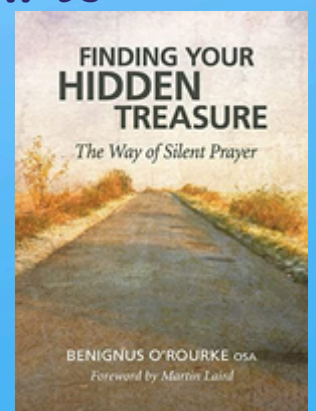
I have been reading *Finding Your Inner Treasure* by Benignus O'Rourke. The book is a look at the principles and practice of silent prayer espoused by St Augustine. The first page carries this quote from St Augustine,

'God speaks to us in the great silence of the heart'.

The book is written in an easy style and has much help for anyone interested in the practice of silent prayer. However it was this paragraph near the end that caught my attention as perhaps the best justification for Group Reunion I have come across!

Our prayer of silence is a prayer of listening. But not an impatient listening. And being silent before God prepares us for being silent before others. As we grow in stillness we are able to listen endlessly. We are able to listen in a new way: to listen without judging, to listen without offering advice, to listen in a way that makes others feel accepted. When we listen in this way we allow people to feel free, free especially of the tyranny of self-condemnation. Once people feel they are not being judged they begin to cease judging themselves.

Nick Hutt



The smoke that thunders up from the soul

A recent visit to Zambia, where the mighty Zambezi River tumbles into the Victoria Falls, has confirmed something of my relationship with God.

My journey from what was originally, at its core, quite a simple spirituality to something more profound and devout was a strange, troubled and powerful one, much like the water that powers over the high rocks and cascades into the chasms of the mighty waterfalls.

I came to a deep sense of intimacy with the Lord of all creation through a time of huge emotional turmoil, and the one thing that I have been able to hold on to ever since -

even when various other dogmas and creeds have had me running screaming in the opposite direction -

has been this sense of kindness. I described it once as something that would twist the Universe out of shape to reach for you when you are hurting. For me, now and forever, it is that simple and that profound.

I saw it in the mighty river as it dropped into a churn so devastating that love and pain and beauty and terror would all lose their individual meaning in its boiling cauldron.

How often have I felt love like that? Love that reveals itself in a place so harsh and jagged it could surely never look anything like love. But it does. It swoops through the most inappropriate moments with indescribable beauty because that's its nature.

To surprise itself.
To surprise us.
To surprise the Universe.

Why would the great creator, the author of all this cosmic passion and vast imagination, choose to live behind our eyes, when there are such wonders out there?

Because this is the spirit that knows what we can be.

This is the spirit that sees the smoke that thunders from the human heart in those moments when, in spite of everything, we touch that impossible kindness and surprise ourselves.

This is all-too-often a world of such tragedy and pain, and if history has taught us anything, there is no power strong enough to stand against such things. Indeed, much of the terror we see comes from the exercise of power to the wrong ends.

But beyond all this, there is the God who dives into bottomless waterfalls, because of the smoke that thunders up from the chasms where no smoke should be. This is our God. This is our hope. This is us...

surprising the Universe and ourselves.

John Hulme

**Our prayer for Advent is
that you all
find the space to breathe
and slowly regather
yourself...**

**the Spirit knows what we
can be....**

**Thanks to all who have
contributed to this Winter
Magazine**