



For the past six weeks I feel as if I have been in a very special place and it is probably the way you feel as well. Now, as we come back to “ordinary time” and the world we share in common with every other being, I find that a number of things have come up to the surface in a very short time.

There is, for example, a great deal of talk about the “Nones”, as in those who respond “none of the above” when asked to identify with a religious denomination. This is not a sudden change, but it is perhaps a fast-developing awareness of an important skepticism about institutional religion or politics, or a number of other establishments for that matter.

As far as watching the church in which we began our spiritual journey go down, there are many different reactions. The gifted author

Louise Erdrich grew up Catholic and recently said of that church; “I am so full of fury that it doesn’t even register anymore.” I can understand her reaction. I grew up in the same faith community. But I feel differently. Much of what I am today came from progressive facets of the Catholic heritage — spirituality, contemplative life, social justice, the mystic dimension and, above all, finding the sacred in ordinary life. As the ships of established churches sink, I feel a responsibility to save some of the valuable cargo for our common use. Perhaps you feel the same about this or other situations. But how do we address these challenges of our times and lives?

For myself, I think it necessary to begin with the leafless trees around me in this season. As the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton also says in his poem, “O peace, bless this mad place.” These trees cannot be valued now for their fruit, or their spring buds or autumn foliage. There is only the unadorned, fundamental structure. We see clearly the strengths and the weaknesses. What do we take away from this experience? I don’t know. Maybe only the indefinable wisdom which comes from exposure to the elemental forces of life itself. It is an insight which seems to somehow come in handy when we turn to face the big issues in our society and in our personal lives.

“Love winter when the plant says nothing.” The stillness, the peace, can indeed bless this mad place in which we all dwell.

Brother Toby