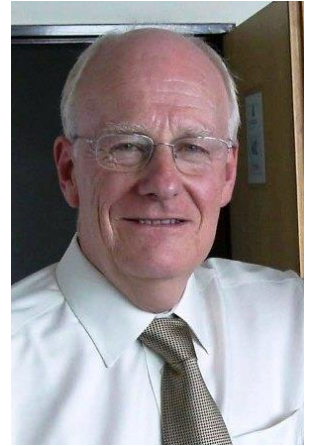


# THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

## Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

*by Peter Wilkinson*



‘Home Sweet Home’. ‘There’s no place like home’. I do hope these sayings ring true to you. Well, like it or not, we’re seeing rather a lot of ‘home’ these days, aren’t we?

For many people, in more normal times, the word ‘home’ can mean safety, security, love, memories, belonging, but sadly for others, it can have far darker meanings, loneliness, bitter memories, intolerance, abuse. And how can we ever imagine what it must be like for a parent who looks upward and sees a hole where the bomb landed? I’m guessing that for many of us just now, there’s not much of what we might call ‘normal’ going on in our lives. Trivial jobs can become achievements in themselves giving a feeling of ‘having done something’. When last did we prioritise the removal of that weed which has the temerity to appear in the lawn, or in getting the Copydex out to repair the annoying snick in the wallpaper that catches our eye each time we sit down to watch a favourite TV programme? After all, that repair is hardly going to enhance the market value of our home, is it?

But when the satisfaction of ‘acting busy’ fades, maybe we need the occasional reminder that there are much deeper aspects to life, aspects of a spiritual nature, which are there regardless of our physical surroundings.

The late Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, once wrote that ‘every moment and every event in a person’s life plants seeds of spiritual vitality in their hearts’. Now there’s food for thought! So, how can we bring these day to day events into our relationship with God, for they hardly seem to accord with prayer as we know it?

Let me share with you what I once learned about the Russian Orthodox Archbishop Anthony Bloom who was widely regarded as an authority on prayer. An older member of his congregation came to see him one day. She shared her concern that although she had prayed all her life, both in the public liturgy as well in private devotion, she had never for a moment had any sense of the presence of God. Were her prayers not heard? Was she not loved by God to whom she was praying?

Archbishop Anthony offered her this advice; when you next come to your time of prayer, don't kneel, don't recite any prayers or psalms, but simply sit down in your favourite chair by the fireside, relax, and see what happens. Sure enough the woman followed the Archbishop's guidance and simply relaxed by the fire in her sitting room. Being a committed and 'busy' person, she had not permitted herself the 'luxury' of time apparently 'wasted' in this way. 'What a lovely room', she reflected as she looked at her ornaments, the furniture and the pictures. She had never stopped to look at the room in this way before, but now she was suddenly aware of how blessed she was in the symbols of family and friendship that surrounded her. She was warmed by the fire, supported by the cushions and delighted by the view from her window. Gratitude and joy for the richness of the life she led were the emotions in her heart. Just as she had been instructed, she made no special effort to pray, but inevitably, she thanked God for all that this room and its contents represented to her. Gradually, she realised that it was as if she was listening to God speaking words of love to her – and every aspect of her life was one of those words, mediated to her by the physical contents of the room where she sat. It had finally dawned upon her that this was what the Archbishop had intended to happen; she had been so busy in every dimension of her life that her busyness had carried over even into her prayer – she had talked to God, praised and thanked Him, but never *listened* to him; never heard Him pleading, 'Hey, can *I* get a word in here sometime, please?'. This was what the Archbishop had identified as he listened to her dismay.

May we have the grace and humility to use this enforced time at home to nurture that most elusive of our senses, LISTENING.