

At Meditatio.

On my first morning at the Meditatio house we opened the blinds after Morning Prayer to find the huge chestnut tree and everything in the garden covered in snow. It was like a scene from a Christmas card, all crisp and white and still. It was the beginning of November and winter had come early.

It wasn't long before I discovered the less romantic side of snow in the form of wet, icy footpaths. I soon learned that walking in snow and living in Community have a lot in common: you have to be prepared to adapt and compromise on where you want to go and how you will get there, a lot of attention is required, and it is less scary and more enjoyable if you can lean on each other from time to time. However when you take the risk it is a wonderful adventure of new discoveries about yourself and the world around you.

The meditation room is the silent hub of the Meditatio house, and of the Community. Whether it was just four of us (Fr Laurence, Henriette from Holland, Maxi from Tasmania, then later Leo from Brazil, and I), or if we were joined by guests staying with us or visiting from many parts of the world, or even if a film crew were filming a DVD, three times a day the house would stop as we gathered to meditate together. Sundays were particularly special when we gathered for a contemplative mass.

The silence of prayer is the foundation of Community. It is what makes living at Meditatio so much more than just sharing accommodation and what makes being part of the World Community a true experience of communion. As Fr John Main says "we share the great and mysterious gift of life in the flesh and in the Spirit".

Morning, Midday and Evening prayer were the anchors that set the rhythm of the day. Often our days were quite busy with cooking and domestic chores to be completed and large numbers of guests to be welcomed. We each had work to do for the Community outside the house and we would accompany Fr Laurence when he gave talks in London and the surrounding area. On Wednesdays I met with Kim Nataraja to plan and develop School of Meditation activities and programs.

Probably my favourite activity at Meditatio was reading and discussing the Rule of St Benedict each morning. It was a time to really examine and share how the wisdom of this ancient Rule is still so relevant in our lives today in a modern Community.

Recreation times were also special and fun, going out for a meal together, a walk in the park after dinner, going to a movie or watching a DVD at home were all special times of sharing. At Christmas we found ourselves pretty well snowed in like many others in the UK. Someone lent us a cookbook and we managed to provide a traditional Christmas dinner for about a dozen people.

In December we had the first of the Meditatio outreach programs on Teaching Christian Meditation to Children with large seminars held in London and other parts of the UK and Ireland. It was my first real taste of the international aspect of our Community with people from all over the world converging on the house. I discovered there is a unique sweetness when communion is shared between different cultures and languages, the warmth and spontaneity of love is somehow highlighted. These gifts continued throughout my time at Meditatio and I formed close bonds with a number of special people from around the world.

We spent New Year on Bere Island and Fr Laurence led a retreat for young people in the first week of January. In February I returned to Australia for our National Conference and then travelled to Malaysia for the Regional Coordinators Meeting.

When I returned to Meditatio at the beginning of April the chestnut tree was bursting with buds and early blossoms; this stirring of life and beauty was a reminder that the Easter Season was approaching.

After a few weeks at the house I headed to Ireland to present workshops to teachers and school chaplains as part of the follow up to our seminars in December. I met a great bunch of vibrant and enthusiastic young people who are keen to deepen their experience of meditation and share it with children in their schools. I then joined the Community on Bere Island for the Holy Week and Easter Retreat. As we celebrated the sacred days with the island people we came to know a unique holiness that connects tradition with place. We knew it on Easter Sunday as we watched the sun rise at the standing stone in the middle of the island, and we shared it when Henriette and I learned the traditional way of baking soda bread.

In the period after Easter I travelled to Shropshire to spend time with the Community there and to lead a Quiet Day. It was then back to London for the next Meditatio program on Meditation and Mental Health as well as an inspiring series of talks by Sarah Bachelard.

At the end of May I returned to Australia for a few weeks. Before I left we were blessed with days of glorious sunshine, the chestnut tree became radiant with green leaves and lunches in the garden were a real treat.

When I returned to Meditatio at the beginning of August it was as if I had never left. The chestnut tree had a new surprise for me, large spikey nuts that fell when you least expected! The small group of children who came for meditation on Sundays introduced me to the traditional English game of conkers reminding me that everything including spikey nuts have a purpose in the circle of life.

In the weeks that followed I spent time in Ireland at the John Main Seminar and gave talks for the Community in Nth Ireland, I then travelled to Italy for the International School Retreat. I also managed to visit the beautiful city of Bath and present talks there.

My time at the Meditatio house has come to an end and I'm now back home in Australia. From Meditatio Henriette tells me that the branches of the chestnut tree are bare once more. Just like the seasons in our own lives the changes continue. Henriette is facing her own journey and doing battle with an unexpected illness. We managed to capture a few moments on the phone, the line wasn't all that clear but the connection that has grown in our hearts was as strong as ever. We have tasted the oneness that is experienced in the depths of silence, we share in a community of love. As Fr John Main puts it "We know what is important, we know what endures forever"

Kath Houston.

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