



Journaling with ELIZABETH PROUT

Servant of God

She read the signs of the times, the plight of the marginalised in an age of transition, the homeless, the poverty of living conditions of the immigrants, the dreadful work conditions in the factories and the absence of God reflected in prostitution and crime. And by her actions she was to say:

‘We will be a presence of God among these people;
we will let our actions speak of his love’.

Fr Luke Magee CP

Foreword

These reflections and processes have been drawn together to help us to appreciate Elizabeth Prout in a new way and to integrate and interpret her spirituality in our 21st century context. Elizabeth has always inspired me and I have always longed for someone to work a retreat based on her legacy which enables us to appreciate that she was an outstanding woman of courage and tenacity. Then one day I thought 'why don't you do it yourself?'

My hope is that by reflecting on her life alongside some contemporary writings and the Scriptures we may discover that she can and does speak to our times and she will continue to inspire women and men to do what 'needs to be done' to feed the children of our world so that they may know their dignity and value as children of God.

A few years ago Fr Luke Magee CP spoke at the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine in honour of Elizabeth Prout, Mother Mary Joseph. He highlighted some qualities of Elizabeth which I propose to use as a basis for shaping these reflections.

Thank you to all those Sisters, family members and friends who have inspired and encouraged me on my journey as a Sister of the Cross and Passion.

Sr Brigid Murphy CP

PRAYER

'It is only the one who has sat before the Crucified who can make out the real meaning of the mystery of suffering.' Fr Luke Magee CP

Elizabeth Prout, we know was baptised and brought up as an Anglican so she would have been grounded in stories from the Scriptures and she would no doubt have been instructed in the values of the Gospel. She is likely to have attended St Julian's Church in Shrewsbury where she was baptised or a local Church in Coleham where she lived with her parents. She may have attended Sunday school. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that something was already stirring in Elizabeth which was ignited and fanned into a flame upon meeting Dominic Barberi in Stone where her family had moved when she was in her late teens. She had a deep faith in the providence of God which was to a source of strength for her in the risks she was to take as in many challenges that she faced in establishing a religious congregation. We know very little about how Elizabeth prayed, she kept no journal that we know of and we have few writings to go on but we can be certain she got strength from her relationship with God and that she would have been very familiar with the scriptures especially the Gospels.

Questions for reflection:

How does your experience of childhood faith still influence your spirituality?

What memories do you have of your experience of prayer as a child?

How has prayer changed over your life experience?

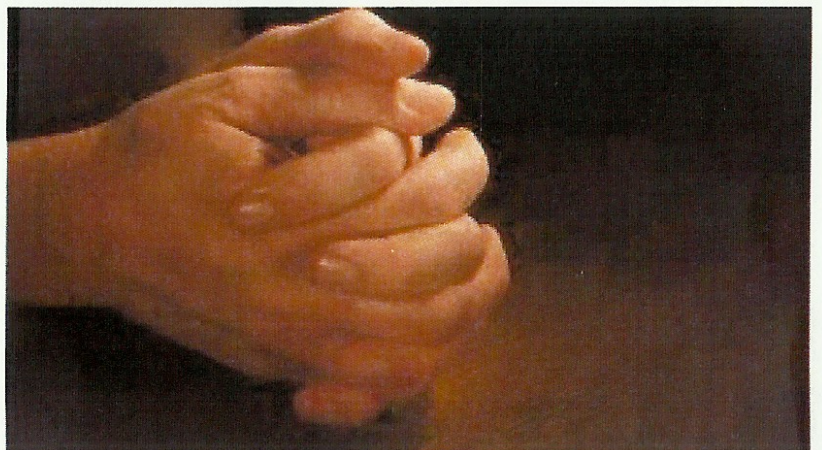
Scripture Reflection:

'One of those days Jesus went out into the hills to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them.'

Lk 6: 12-13

'Faithfulness in prayer leads to a contemplative vision by which God is revealed in faith through the ordinary events of life.'

Norm 45



Psalm 139

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.
If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.
Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.
Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

RISK

'To become a Catholic in the early 1840's was certainly a risk. It was open to misunderstanding and opposition from her family, open to the unofficial persecution of the time. But then to go a step further and join the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, with all the imaginative stories that were circulating about convent life at the time, this was risk indeed! This feature was to run through her life. There was never any opting for security, for the safer approach. This element of religious life touches our lives constantly.'

Fr Luke Magee

Questions for Reflection

How has risk for the 'sake of the Kingdom of God' been part of your life?

What is your experience of opposition and misunderstanding and what has helped you in coping with such experiences?

Scripture Reflection:

'Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain but if it dies it will bring forth many seeds.'

John 12:24



We are totally dependent on God and are freed to place ourselves at the service of the Congregation and its mission in the Church. Norm 16

Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

Attributed - Sir Francis Drake -1577

PIONEERING SPIRIT

'Mother Mary Joseph probably never knew the expression 'Liberation Theology' but she read the signs of the times, the plight of the marginalised in an age of transition, the homelessness and the poverty of the living conditions of immigrants, the dreadful conditions of work in the factories, the consequent absence of God reflected in low morality. Her presence and the apostolate of her Sisters would be among these people. Elizabeth saw what needed to be done and she risked all to respond to the need. In this as in all her endeavours her strength was from God, a God who in Jesus shows us how to risk for the kingdom.'" Fr Luke Magee CP

Questions for Reflection

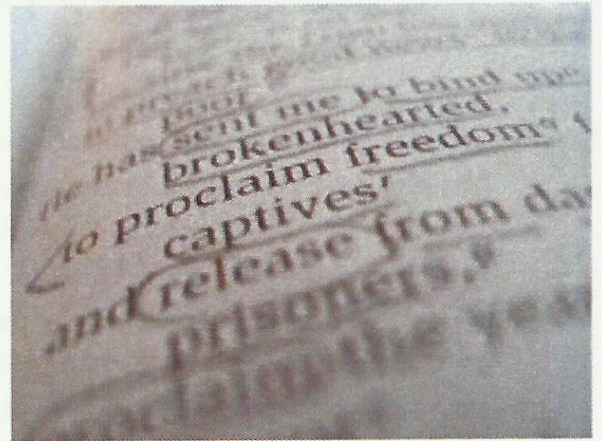
How do you read the signs of the times now?

How have the signs of the times been a catalyst for action in your life?

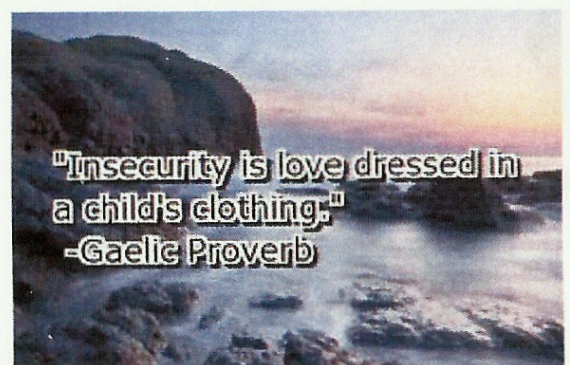
Scripture Reflection:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'
Luke 4:16-19



Individually and as a Congregation we accept the insecurity that faithfulness to her charism requires of us. Norm 52



When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

'Out of Solitude' Henri Nouwen

PROPHET

'With Fr Croskell and Guadentius she grasped that most important apostolic priority which is: to be a prophet. As she stood on the threshold of the new industrial age, she fulfilled the role of prophet in discerning the will of God and articulating this conviction. She escaped the bonds of the old institutes and initiated a whole new concept of witness to God. She must stand as an example to us as we enter a new stage of universal culture, this technological age. We too have to discern the needs of this world, grasp its opportunities, and plan appropriate apostolic action.' Fr Luke Magee CP

Questions for Reflection

Do I recognise the prophets of our times?

What might hinder me from hearing the prophets of our time?

What are the pressing needs now and how do we respond and how do we call others to action?

Scripture Reflection:

his is what God asks of you,
only this...
To act justly,
To love tenderly, and
To walk humbly
with your God.

micah 6:8

The corporate mission of the members of the Congregation is to be prophets of the Paschal Mystery in the midst of the sufferings of the world by witnessing to the reconciling, forgiving and compassionate love of God in terms the world can understand. Norm 51



A Prayer of Oscar Romero

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders;
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future that is not our own. Amen.

This prayer is often attributed to Oscar Romero
but it was first written by Bishop Kenneth Untener and used at a memorial for
Archbishop Oscar Romero

PATIENCE, HUMILITY, BALANCE

'In her life Mother Mary Joseph had to balance her own integrity in the face of the will of some who were guiding her in establishing the Congregation. Fr Gaudentius undoubtedly had a great love for the Congregation and its foundress but at times he appears determined that Mother Mary Joseph would be marked with the Passion. His rather stern exhortations only brought to light Elizabeth's PATIENCE, HUMILITY and BALANCE. Elizabeth will not allow herself to surrender her integrity and honesty. 'I know you would not wish me to do it, because you, like me, detest deceit.' Fr Luke Magee CP

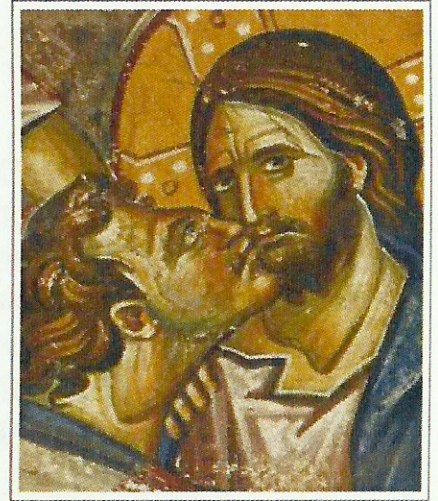
Questions for Reflection

How in your life have you experienced your integrity being challenged?

How did you respond?

Scripture Reflection:

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kedron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees.



They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go. This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

Tempered by suffering and sustained by holy joy, Mother Mary Joseph risked all to build a community founded on trust, love and service. It is from this dedicated ecclesial woman that we receive our special heritage to love and serve the poor and afflicted. Norm 5



My soul magnifies the Lord
And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid;
For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed;
Because He who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His name;
And His mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear Him.
He has shown might with His arm,
He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and has exalted the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of His mercy
Even as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

PASSION

'Her life was to be touched by the Passion constantly from the physical suffering of a tubercular knee that stayed with her till her death, the experience of calumny, of being misrepresented, misunderstood, experiencing the loss of Sisters, the loss of support, even from those nearest to her, like Provost Croskell; having to live in physical poverty, standing before what seemed like the failure of the new Congregation. 'I have toiled in vain; I have exhausted myself for nothing'. Fr Luke Magee CP

Questions for Reflection

How has suffering, your own and that of others touched your life and how has it affected your spiritual growth?

What qualities has suffering brought to the fore as you have encountered personal suffering and/or the suffering of people with whom you have walked through difficult times?

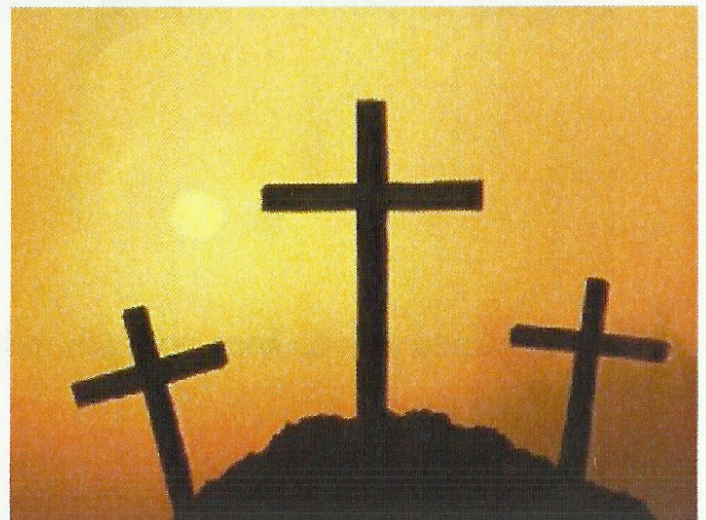


Scripture Reflection:

'but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.'

1Cor 1: 20-25

Identification with Jesus Christ in the mystery of his Passion, Death and Resurrection is at the heart of our vocation.....in a true spirit of compassion we grow in solidarity with the crucified of the world, sharing with them our conviction of the power of the Cross.' Norm 2



PERSEVERENCE

'At times she must have been very severely tempted to give up the struggle- to say with Isaiah 'I have toiled in vain; I have exhausted myself for nothing.' When you read in the Chronicles that 'at this time the Congregation was undergoing many and great difficulties' that included loss by death and by departure, opposition from clergy and people, investigation of the Congregation. But out of that suffering came resignation and a new confidence to go on and revise the rule. We must mention here Ignatius Spencer with his gentler encouragement and help. He probably understood better the womanly character. I feel that in prayer I can overcome. Today there is a great need for us to probe, to investigate that spirit which inspired St Paul of the Cross, Blessed Dominic, Fr Ignatius and Mother Mary Joseph, and to translate it into the language and expression of our times.' Fr Luke Magee CP

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever felt that you wanted to give up?

What was happening in your life at the time?

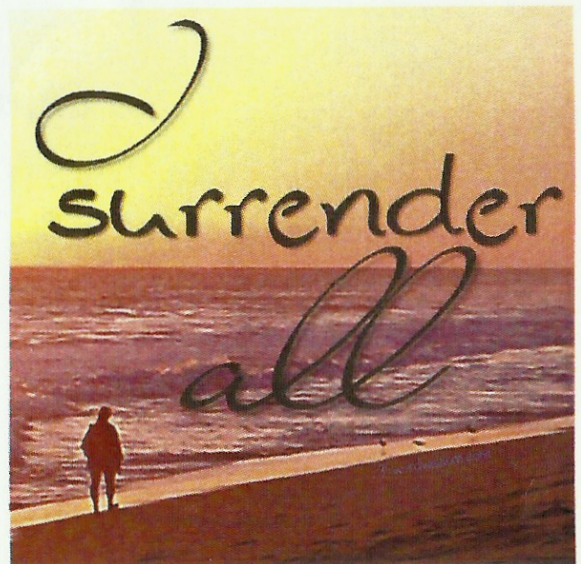
What helped you to keep going in spite of difficulty?

Scripture Reflection:

As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing. Make every effort to come and see me as soon as you can. As it is, Demas has deserted me for love of this life and gone to Thessalonica, Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia; only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you; I find him a useful helper in my work.
2 Tim 4: 6

'When death comes each sister having lived a faithful life may joyfully identify herself with Christ who in His final act of surrender redeemed us and accomplished his mission, relinquishing his life into His Father's hands.' Norm 87

'What do you want to caught dead doing?'
Joan Chichester



PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT

*Father,
I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures –
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul:
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.*

Charles de Foucauld

Mother of Sure Hope in all our
moments of doubt and trial
gain for us the grace, ever to
serve your Son, as you did with
deep faith, calm courage and
with a heart untroubled by
distrust in him or in his
everlasting love.

Amen

The Invitation

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing. It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love for your dream for the adventure of being alive. It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon. I want to know if you have touched the centre of your own sorrow if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shrivelled and closed from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain mine or your own without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it. I want to know if you can be with joy mine or your own if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful to be realistic to remember the limitations of being human. It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself. If you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul. If you can be faithless and therefore trustworthy. I want to know if you can see Beauty even when it is not pretty every day. And if you can source your own life from its presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure yours and mine and still stand at the edge of the lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes."
It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can live with failure yours and mine and still stand at the edge of the lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes."

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair weary and bruised to the bone and do what needs to be done to feed the children. It doesn't interest me who you know or how you came to be here. I want to know if you will stand in the centre of the fire with me and not shrink back. It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied. I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments

Oriah Mountain Dreamer

I will not die an unlived life.

I will not die an unlived life.

I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.

I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible,
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.

I choose to risk my significance;
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.

Fully Alive - Dawna Markova

There is nothing in creation
which does not have some radiance,
either greenness or seeds or beauty otherwise it
would not be part of creation.

Hildegarde of Bingen

A Time for Everything

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

Eccles 3:

**'To live you must choose
To love you must encounter
To grow you must suffer.'**

A prayer for skin-shedding

There is a time for everything

A time for every season under heaven:

A time to be insecure and a time to have security

A time to have strong opinions and
a time to let them go.

A time to be confused and a time to have clarity

A time to be healthy and a time to be sick

A time to experience success and a time to know failure

A time to be young and a time to grow old

A time to feel at peace and a time to face conflict

A time to have friends and a time for loneliness

A time to be weak and a time to be strong

A time to feel lost and a time to find your way home

A time to shed the skin and a time to
welcome a new one.

Joyce Rupp

Short Litany of the Holy Spirit

All who are led by the Spirit are children of God.
By this we know that we abide in him and he in us,
because he has given us of his Spirit. (Silence)

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit:
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

When the doors are closed and we are afraid to move.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

When we are weak and unable to act.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

When we are hesitant and unable to speak.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

When we lack energy and are unable to cope
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

That we may go out in your power.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

That we may live and work for you.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit!

That we may be part of your mission.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit

To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes
to let it go,
to let it go.

In Blackwater Woods -Mary Oliver

**What they undertook to do
They brought to pass;
All things hang like a drop of dew
Upon a blade of grass.**

W.B. Yeats