

**IN THE
SILENT
SPACES**

Television is something about which I frequently moan - meaningless repeats, noisy silliness, questionable language - but it is also something for which I have great admiration. I am grateful, suprised, awed and enriched by space exploration, deep sea photography, archaeology and - incredibly to many, many others, - by the "Great British Bake - Off"! Those who know me well would be highly amused by this statement, because I CANNOT bake - not a pancake, not a doughnut! So to me the vision of human hands producing fabulous forms of cakes and pastries is quite awesome. The most awesome of all is the skill to produce LAYERED cakes, and even LAYERED pastry. I am overawed by the fact that someone can be complimented on "the very good spaces between your layers"!

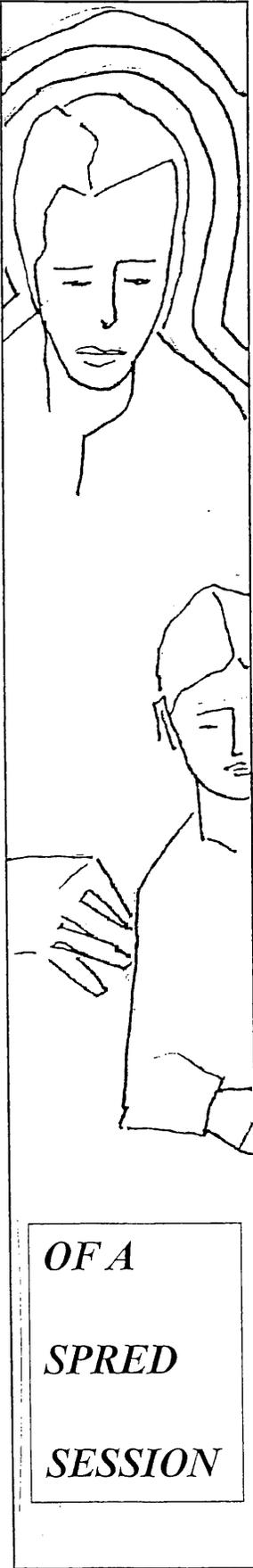
Watching a programme on which participants were judged on the perfection of the layers - and spaces - in their puffy pastry set me off thinking - no not about cakes and pies - about layers!

What else is layered? What else has layers we don't even notice? There are a multitude of answers, but the one I want to explore is that of words.

Words have layers of meaning and importance for us. They have sounds which reach our ears, they have familiar meanings our brains and our attention interpret.

Words also have deeper layers. There are times when they touch us deeply, when they convey the attitudes and even the affections of others, for example in times of congratulations, or times of bereavement. And there are other deeper layers of communication in the words we hear: places, or spaces in which we attune with the person uttering the sounds, in which our personal presence is met, enriched. Such words we keep "in our hearts" as Mary, the mother of Jesus did.

It is in our hearts, too, that we treasure the words of Sacred Scripture: we live our lives by them. These words also have layers. When we hear the words of the Scriptures read in church or during a prayer service, like our own words, the topmost layer is the sounds they make, sounds with which we are familiar; but we do not find sounds enough, we listen to find a level of meaning beyond the sounds. If we reflect on that, we are able to find yet another layer - meaningful, or personal, or enlightening. And there are other layers, deeper than these, which may be revealed to us because these words lead us to the Word of God, the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. Our prayerful attentiveness leads us to deepen our personal presence with this holy Word.



“Before all creation the Word had been born,
With God ever dwelling, the Word that was God.
Before the beginning, when time was not yet,
The Word that was Wisdom was dwelling with God.” (James Quinn, S.J.)

This Word unfolds chords of communication within each soul, opening each one to discover the meaning of the words of scripture, helping each one to approach the depth of the mystery of our loving God. Jesus the Word is present to us both in the words of Sacred Scripture and in the silences in which we pause to reflect on them.

The words of scripture, therefore, don't just have layers of meaning, they have layers of communication, layers of contact.

What then of the words we use in our sessions?

The first part of a session occurs at the catechist preparation session when the leader reads the goal. Leaders are advised to read this twice - not just to make sure that everyone has heard correctly, and not just to make sure that everyone knows what the goal is, but to ensure that everyone has had a chance to imbibe the goal, to set off on the right track for this specific session.

As I reflect on it now, I think there should be more of a pause than I, as a leader catechist, am inclined to give, a space between the layers (like the perfect puff pastry). I will try to do this in the future.

The meaning of the words of the goal lies deep below the surface of the sounds; we have to sink into it gently, peacefully. Listening, then, to the story affords us another stage in the process: the words convey meanings, situations, memories, and there follows a silence, a reflective time allowing us to respond, to move through the layers of meaning.

From this silence we move to our celebration area where we share these responses, we identify them with our liturgical experiences and we hear anew the word, the Word of God.

This Word has great depths, it reaches many layers into the hidden crevices of each soul - the inner spirit which has prepared itself by sifting through the outer layers of the meanings of the words. The Word of God reaches beyond grammar and intellect: it brings us into contact - personal contact - with the Son of God. The words we each receive, through the leader catechist, bring us the message which Jesus himself wishes us to hear, wishes us to receive deep-down in the layers of our being, as deep as we are able to go. We respond with song and gesture, then we ponder in silence, so that when we come to the other half of our session we come in an attitude of attentiveness which will guide our friends along the right path.

These friends we welcome to our group have always had to live with layers of sounds. Some have hearing problems, some have cerebral problems, some have comprehensive problems. What do they hear? What do they sense or feel? They are listening, looking, searching for meaning in the sights and gestures which surround them, even if hearing and comprehension are impeded, it is the gesture of welcome which draws them into the peaceful atmosphere.

In the silence of the activity time we give each other space to clear our heads of the day's happenings; we can all relax into a peaceful listening mode, because we are all preparing to hear God's Word. What we will hear is not just the sounds of it but the deeper meaning it holds for each one. The use of symbol does the same: it helps us to move from one layer of meaning to another. Drawn together by our responses, we consider why we come together, why we go to church with other people and why we lift our hearts to God.

There are some observers, some families, some clergy, who think that we should read longer passages of Scripture, maybe give an explanation afterwards. When I first joined Spred, I thought the shortness of the Scripture passage was an acknowledgement of the inabilities of the children in the group. When I was training in Chicago I recognized that it gave space for people to attune themselves to the intention of the session. Now I see that each word has an importance, because each word has layers of meaning underneath its sound. St. Teresa of Avila recommends a form of deep prayer which uses each word of the Our Father, its deeper meaning being absorbed in silence. The shortness of the scripture passage, coupled with the slow reading, the quiet tones, the gentle gestures of the catechist, allows time for a fraction of God's Word to sink through the layers of our understanding and reveal a new awareness of God's presence and care for us.

Sometimes we are asked "What do you actually do?" It is quite easy to say "spiritual development" but what does it mean? It isn't something we can judge, or measure, or even view. It is this movement into mystery, this unseen progress to contact the Word of God. No matter what may seem on the surface to be blocking our progress into the mystery, there is always the One who can reach us, by divine power and wisdom.

"When all things were in quiet silence,
and the night was in the midst of her course
thine almighty Word, O Lord,
leapt down from thy royal throne." (Wisdom 18:19)

The night of course needn't be the darkness of the earth, it may be the shadow of being misunderstood, of being exhausted, of being confused by the speed of the sounds and gestures which others communicate, or it may be the dark shadow of being frequently overlooked. It may also be anxieties about family, about work, about money or health. Those darkneses may accompany us into silent spaces but they do not hinder the Word from meeting us there. God has the power to reach from the depths of his Being and communicate with us in those quiet spaces between our active efforts.

It's in the silent spaces of a Spred session that this can happen, so we create an enfolding silence, a space between the layers of life, where these other layers can be experienced and the love of God, the wisdom of God, the Word of God, can make their home in us and the friends he has entrusted to our care.

This newsletter is written in honor of Sr. Kathleen Mary Tracey, SND,
a faithful friend, the editor of the European Spred Newsletter for many
years, who died on October 8, 2015.

Sr. Margaret Duffy, SND
Spred Catechist, Paisley, Scotland



CALENDAR

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

Feb. 7, Mar.6, April 3, May1

MAMRE SPRING DINNER DANCE

Drury Lane Oakbrook, April 24, 2016

SPRED TRAINING

Introduction course (2-1) Feb. 13,20,27 1-6pm

English and Spanish at Spred Center, 30th and Lowe

Enter through parking lot, go through garden door.

Role Orientation (3-1)March 12,19 1-6pm

English and Spanish at Spred Center, 30th and Lowe

Enter through parking lot, go through garden door.

OBSERVATION

6-10 Group Mon. Feb. 8, 22, Mar. 7, April 11 6:00 pm

11-16 Group Tues. Feb. 9, 23, April 12, 26 7:00 pm

17-21 Group Tues. Feb. 9, 23, April 12, 26 7:00 pm

22+ Group Mon. Feb. 8, 22 April 11, 25 7:00 pm

Core Team Morning of Enrichment 9:30am to noon

Jan. 23, 2016, Donation \$3:00 a person

RSVP Elizabeth Sivek, 312842-1039 ext 13

SPRED

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