

My Special Moments at Bonnevaux

by Noelene Lim

Last Sunday, after mass, adoration and celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi were over, I had a brief escape relaxing on a sofa with a cup of coffee in my hand, eyes closed. The fragrance and flavour of that warm coffee brought recollections of my time at Bonnevaux, where the practice of Christian meditation is wrapped in nature's embrace. It has been over a month since my return, yet I am still reminiscing over my special moments there. It was a personal journey deeper into the mystery of God to



discover and experience the expanse of his love, the essence of his goodness, and the power of his greatness, all given freely without conditions to an unworthy soul like me.

My mind travelled to that quiet afternoon on the second day at Bonnevaux. I strolled into nature's private sanctuary where the noises of the world were replaced by a forest symphony – the buzz of an unseen bee, the splashing of a carefree fish, the cuckoo of a chirpy bird. The sounds anchored me in the natural flow of all life. The plain, silent forest floor reminded me of the stability



and strength that lies within each of us; the trees spoke resilience and determination; the breeze whispered secrets of change and impermanence. They invited me to let go of attachments and expectations



and be free. I found solace in the understanding that everything is interconnected and constantly evolving as part of the tapestry of God's creation, every life an integral part of his grand design.

Then God played a joke on me. I continued wandering and was lost in the forest for over an hour with no idea where I was going. Yes, hadn't some retreatants warned I was brave to trek alone? Now I cried out, 'Hey, God, I thought we had a deal – I hike, you guide. Did I misread the map, or your divine plan?' The trees just rustled in laughter, and I was left to find my way out or be lost in my mental wilderness where I had begun with a wilderness adventure in the woods. I relied on my own logic and the navigation skills of Google Maps on my mobile phone, but the signals were weak. I wandered in circles several times thinking, 'I've got this right,' only to realise it was another dead end. Now I felt anxious but, surprisingly, not afraid. Into that lostness, a light filtered through. Shouldn't I be trusting God rather than my own bumbling efforts? I paused then in faith handing over the GPS. And there before me was a little path into the meadow where I stumbled upon an exit with dear



Janette searching for her lost mate. That was how God taught me that trust in him is the divine navigation system for our life's journey.

The fourth day at Bonnevaux was serene and sunny. As usual, I took a

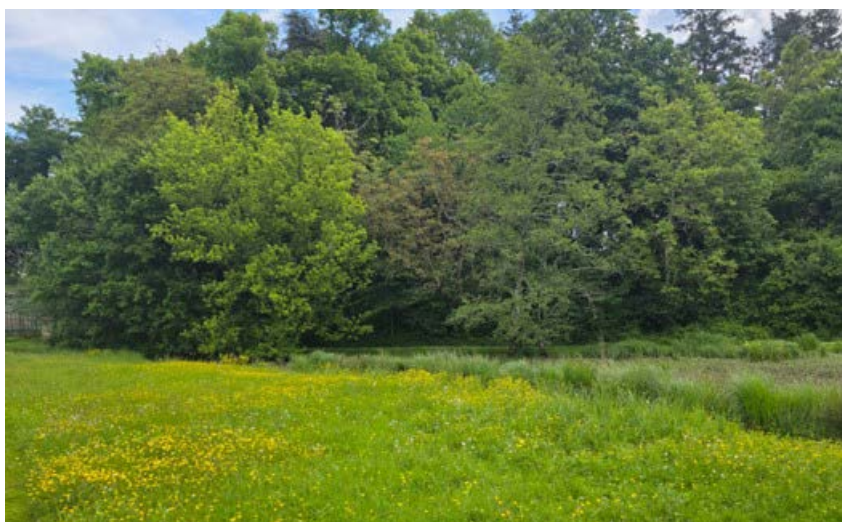


leisurely stroll across the meadow from the Abbey to the Barn for our morning meditation. The sunlight cast a glow on the grass dotted with yellow and white wild flowers dancing in the spring breeze. Each step forward opened fresh wonders of God's creation, from vast open skies to little dew-soaked petals on the ground – the humble awakening of a world in glory.

A whisper in my heart breathed, 'Pause, don't move. Stretch out your arms straight.' I stood grounded like a cross in the middle of the field. A light, pure and tender, poured inexpressible peace and joy through me. I knew it was God's outpouring of his love, his presence so real and palpable. Basking in his embrace, I felt 'weightless', like a floating cloud, as if all my worries and burdens were being lifted away. I realised it was not just a nice experience but in fact a healing, transforming moment.

I felt connected with all of creation and saw the divine spark in every person. What an enlightenment to understand that living heaven on earth, tasting the goodness of God is possible, if we open ourselves to his love and grace. If only that precious moment could last forever, nothing else would matter! I don't know how long I stood rooted there lost to space and time. Afterwards, I shared my experience with some retreatants and our retreat leader, Janet Robbins: I had had my 'aha moment' at Bonnevaux. Anthony, a fellow retreatant, said it was an epiphany of God's grace. My faith is weak and my trust in him is not complete, so God used an extraordinary approach to touch me and draw me closer. That personal experience awoke in me a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper connection to the Almighty One.

Another transforming experience for me was the gradual unveiling of inner freedom and inner peace through meditation. Each day at Bonnevaux, quietly observing nature, appreciating the gift of every life, and just being in the present without judgment or agenda, I found freedom beginning to take root in me. The chains of expectations and the need to perform, to achieve, to conform began to loosen; there was



nobody to impress, nothing to prove, only the raw, unfiltered experience of existence. It was liberation. Another epiphany: true freedom cannot be found in external circumstances, but only in the acceptance of and release from my inner bondage.

Over the days, as my meditation deepened, my cluttered mind slowly cleared allowing me to see everything around me with fresh eyes. Unshackled from self-doubt and fear, I found peace. I was able to observe my own thoughts and emotions without becoming entangled in them. I felt able to journey forward with greater ease, clarity, and confidence. It was not about escaping the reality of life but about embracing it with open heart and mind, in union with the Spirit of Christ always. A quiet joy within resonated with the sounds of nature that harmonised with my heartbeat.

The wisdom and effortless balance in the natural world became for me a mirror reflecting my own capacity for peace. The tranquillity, freedom, and peace cultivated at Bonnevaux still linger in me. There, Christian meditation became for me a promise of refuge, always accessible within.

I now embark on this pilgrimage with a conscious choice to step away from the artificial and re-engage with the authentic. I believe I have found a path to reconnect with my true self and live more peacefully, more fully. My journey has only just begun.

