

Article for page two PAX July August 2009

What's the difference between a holiday and a retreat? I asked myself just that question, while reflecting on my retreat to the island of Iona in the middle of May.

A holiday is all about rest and refreshment, sometimes miles away from home, sometimes just a rest at home, away from work. And some holidays are such hard work and so full of activity that we need to come home for a rest!

A retreat - well that's also all about rest and refreshment, and in my case this year my retreat was miles away from home, away from the telephone and television, the radio and newspapers. I went having great plans of reading a 'holy' book and spending the time wisely listening to God. But when I came home what had I achieved? the 'holy' book had not even been opened, I had worshipped in Iona abbey, prayed with others on retreat, walked several miles and picked up some pebbles from the beach where St Columba is supposed to have landed all those hundreds of years ago. I'd paddled in the very fresh sea, hoping the cold and salt water would do the old 'arthur ritus' in my toes some good. But what, I asked myself, had I achieved?

Of course I had been asking the wrong question, it wasn't about what I had achieved but what God had achieved in me during those three days on the island so far away from home.

In our busy lives we lead these days we all need to stop occasionally, empty ourselves of all that keeps us busy, and rest, refresh, and review. For all of us a holiday or a retreat should tick those boxes. Theologically speaking holidays are 'holy days' time to be with God and aware of God being with you, and time to celebrate because of what God has done for us, that's why we have holidays at Christmas, Easter and Whitsun.

If you have never been on a retreat, think about making one, even a day at St Albans Abbey can be a retreat, or a quiet day in the garden, with no jobs to do and no books to read. The problem we have is that it is so easy to **do** things, but just remember we are **human beings** not human **doings** so allow yourselves to **be** this summer.

It all makes you wonder does God ever have a holiday? Does God need to go on retreat? for surely God is one person who can't possibly be holier than thou!

Maybe our retreats are like postcards from God on holiday, saying 'wish you were here, weather lovely, company excellent and many thanks for looking after my treasures'.

So to all of you, God's treasures out there, enjoy your holidays and holy days, and by way of a postcard to God, why not pop into a church near you and say a prayer.

Happy holidays!

Reverend Ann