

# Along the track

## Decluttering

In the town where I live, the rather scruffy railway precinct has been developed into a car park. Old sleepers, rubble and rails have been removed, an old building has been relocated. What was once a pretty unsightly area has been rejuvenated. As an added bonus, the restoration has revealed an unobstructed view of the wonderful, historic railway station building. It was always there but before it was obscured and rather unappealing, but now!

Sometimes we have to get rid of stuff, clean up the mess and discard what we have hoarded 'in case they might come in handy sometime'. Don't we pack suitcases for travel that way too? Not many of us are minimalists. Do you ever watch those shows about selling houses? What a difference decluttering can make! It can reveal all sorts of things, bringing out the beauty of what might have lain hidden. Not a bad metaphor for life really.

Decluttering our life can certainly be a challenge in a society that urges us to buy more and more, to have more and more but, in reality, it's not hard to find reasons why we ought to get rid of stuff – it is good to recycle, to donate things we don't need to others, not just our unwanted junk. Making the decision to remove possessions makes us ask some important questions about what we value, what's truly most important to us. Sometimes it helps us let go of the past, to embrace the present without hindrances. There really is joy in giving, especially of the things that mean something to us – in Pope Francis' words, freeing ourselves "from the obsession of possession, from the fear of losing what we own, from the sadness of those who do not want to share their well-being with others".

Decluttering our lives doesn't only apply to possessions. Sometimes we need to take stock and get rid of the things that may be obscuring the real me. Despite the fact that we have so many reasons to be grateful, to be at peace and happy – the love of family, friends, health, material possessions, food on the table, a roof over our heads - we still can experience anger, jealousy and feeling hurt and wounded. We can feel frustration at 'what might have been'. The problem is, we can hang onto these feelings, we store them up. We can hold onto grudges from the long distant past, feeling slighted and overlooked perhaps. We can sometimes point to certain events and individuals that have hurt us deeply and blame much of the pain or anger we carry on them. Sometimes past attitudes can make us apprehensive, even afraid, a fear of the unknown, where's it all going. Without some decluttering we are seldom fully at peace with who we are or at peace with others. Our cluttered minds can drag us into "the past" and pull us away from the present. We tend to hold onto too much baggage. It is not surprising that St Paul wrote:

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32*

It is good to do a stocktake of ourselves at regular intervals, of our attitudes, our beliefs, of what motivates us, what we hold dear; to reflect on the people and the things that we have loved in life and what difference they have made to who we are and what we have become. It is always helpful to reflect on the people, the events that have liberated me, the ones who encouraged me, who freed me from being afraid to do this or that, those who supported me in the good times and the bad, encouraged me when it was time to step out 'into the deep'. It is helpful to think about our beliefs, those that sustain, those we have outgrown, our prejudices and where they came from. We can hang onto them for too long. As St Paul reminded us: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became an adult, I put away the things of a child (1 Cor 13:11)".

Decluttering our minds can give us the freedom to think, to develop ideas, plans, visions and dreams. We are all extremely busy and pressured. We have technology at our finger tips, information about virtually everything, cell phones, iPods and iPads, personal computers - we are perhaps the most communication-conscious people ever. We spend a lot of time 'multitasking,' but that doesn't always allow time for reflection, for communicating within, time to savour the moment, time to explore what's really deep in our mind. That also calls for a bit of decluttering, giving ourselves time for enjoying the sacredness of each moment, some time for 'aloneness' with ourselves and with God, taking time for prayer. The rejuvenation of the railway precinct enhanced a beautiful old building but it also highlighted its surroundings. The neighbourhood is no longer the 'other' end of town. It has also given us a much improved and wider view, a different perspective. When we come to take stock, to re-appraise, to declutter we can come to see the bigger picture, not just who we are, what we are meant to be and what others need from us but a wider view of others, the world we live in. Perhaps Nelson Mandela's, inaugural address as President of South Africa might throw further light:

You are a child of God...  
We were born to make manifest  
the glory of God that is within us.  
It is not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
we unconsciously give other people  
permission to do the same.

Regards  
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