

FINDING THE HIDDEN TREASURE by Benignus O'Rourke

Chapter 37 – Streams of Living Water



Many people wanting to make spiritual progress, wanting to know God and his love, fall into the trap of starting from the outside and working inwards, beginning with outer virtues and hoping little by little to change within. But for Augustine change has to be from inside out.

He writes: *'At the well where Our Lord sat down to rest great mysteries took place.'* He was referring to the time when Jesus was making his way back to Galilee at the end of his ministry in Judaea. Tired by the journey, Jesus sat down by Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus told her, *'Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again, but no one who drinks the water that I shall give will ever be thirsty again: the water I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life'* (John 4:13-14).

At another time, after teaching in the temple at Jerusalem, Jesus said: *'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink. As scripture says, "From his heart shall flow streams of living water"'* (John 7:37-38).

That is the pledge. We shall drink from the stream of living water within. Gradually this will lead to growth and transformation in our lives. It all has to happen within, and God is working in us and with us to achieve it.

In the early stages of our quiet prayer, we begin to discover the areas of our lives where the streams of living water which Jesus offers have turned into stagnant pools. We may find ourselves asking: *'Have I always been so angry and just never noticed it?'* Or, like the student, *'Have I always lived with these negative thoughts?'*

So, our first discovery in the deeper silence may be our own stagnation, created by attitudes we have not noticed in ourselves before. There may be unacknowledged depression, fear or anger, for example, which can all create stagnation. There is no need to be alarmed. Once these are recognised, we can deal with them, and the life-giving water begins to flow again, bit by bit.

Over the years we have trained ourselves to stop the stream of life from flowing. We have created our whirlpools and defended them. It takes time to see our defensiveness. Patience and time spent in the Lord's healing presence helps us to see our manoeuvres more clearly. It may be unpleasant, but it is also a bit like taking huge draughts of fresh air.

Stuart, the young man in Iris Murdoch's novel *The Good Apprentice* who aims at holiness, prefers the way of meditation to what he has been taught was prayer. Prayer, he believed, was *'struggle, reflection, self-examination'*, whereas meditation, he felt, was *'refuge, quietness, purification, replenishment'*.

Silence purifies, silence empties. By taking refuge in the silence and allowing our minds and hearts to become quiet, the stagnant pools will be freed, and the stream of living water will flow again from the depths of our being.

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