

## Christmas/Weed Mats . . . grow/love/know . . .



**W**eed mats are used to grow a garden. A weed mat lets us relax and focus on what we want to grow. There's no need to labour over all the weeds that need pulling, make neat rows and certainly not break up the top soil, destroying the 'nature' of the soil.

What we actually want to grow/love/know gets us up each day, like Mary's "Yes."

December the month of Advent, waiting on the coming of our God, can be overwhelmed by the 'glitter of the Christmas tree'. Yet there is a pulsing of hope that is palpable. Most of us desire to feel connected, be loved, share, to give and receive. But we can be disappointed: too much to do, not enough space, the failure of our expectations to fruit in a meaningful way. Often our deepest need for meaning is left wanting.

St. Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus, says that our choices decide our orientation, what will shape our life. Making decisions is the heart beat of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. Making decisions are a bit like putting down a weed mat.

Recently I attended a gathering of Jesuits and lay who work in their ministries. Two priests celebrated their final vows after twenty years. Each of us there felt their "Yes", not necessarily as a final vow, but as a yearning to know and follow what is calling us. This "Yes" will hold us, both in the moving toward and the fall away. It will bring us back home. Ignatius referred to the Jesuits as 'minima compania,' in other words, we are the least, 'just' earthly vessels, limited and fragile, yet in this vulnerability the transcendent power of God is at work.

We are nothing special, but the vow, what we do internally, is something very

special. I think it takes a long time to realise that we are 'minima'. It is when we let God be God.

One of the priests talked of his experiences of being led gently, both by a mentor who was a big part of his formation, and the people/parishes who shaped him these last 20 years since his first vows. Such accompanying is not about knowledge but walking beside. We grow into life, we don't just arrive fully formed. It's something that our perfectionist and self-reliant striving selves seem to forget.

We know that the story of Jesus is such a story: Mary will search in her heart and say "Yes"; God will show us the way to be become human by giving us his Son, thus becoming pulsing beings listening to the deepest part of our selves. The three wise men said "Yes", they listened to and followed their hearts, they followed the stars.

Why weed mat? I think most us can feel pressured to look neat and tidy, with everything ordered. We have many weeds and we can be unfocused. But now we wait, Christ will come, and the weed mat will help us, not to get busy and lost in the weeds, but with our "Yes". We are loved as we are. Then a hole is poked through for the seedling to emerge, right there amongst the weeds. We just need to make some room for the little plant, a space for the light to shine through.

**C**hristmas is like that, a mess of all things, but in the midst is the baby Jesus, vulnerable like us. He grows, loved and nurtured by Mary and orientated entirely to his Father. We wait in joyful expectation, knowing that in the chaos we can behave just like a weed mat. It's the "Yes" in the midst of everything that allows his light to shine through.

*We cannot do everything,  
And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well,  
It may be incomplete,  
But it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's Grace  
To enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results  
But that is the difference  
Between the Master builder and the worker.  
We are workers not Master builders,  
Ministers, not Messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.*

(Often called 'Romero prayer' written by Ken Untener in honour of Oscar Romero in 1979)

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