**Session 2**

In the autumn of last year, I went to see (or really it was a complete experience) an exhibition at the Royal Academy by an internationally acclaimed performance artist, who has long since fascinated me. She is called **Marina Abramovic** whose origins are in Serbia. This was a retrospective exhibition which remembered a project from 2010 called ***The Artist is Present*** when Abramovic sat immobile for over 700 hours (7-8 hours every day) for 2 months, when she invited members of the public to come and sit opposite her at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, whilst she retained eye contact with them**.(9)** The artist said that this was an intensely spiritual experience, for when is it that we truly find the courage to look into another’s face for a long period of time? Art then which helps us to look upon the face of God in each person or in every part of creation ….. Abramovic is worth looking up – she has had a number of challenging but fascinating projects over the years which use the human body as the vehicle into a variety of ideas.

I love this idea because it has become something of a metaphor for me. I often say to people who are interested in using images and the visual to help deepen prayer life just use the question – **“What do you see?”** The gospels are full of stories of people seeing but not really seeing. Jesus often restores sight, but he also uses those encounters to go deeper – to talk about spiritual insight as well.

Ask people to get into groups to look at the image sets. **These different set of images all relate to a monastic practice or spiritual theme. Some of the images might be described as specifically religious but some of them are not. But it has always been important to me to not make a distinction in this way because I believe that everything is infused with the love, energy and restorative power of God. For those of you who really can’t bear to be without words, I’ve included a quote/poem for each one as well. Some of you will have the same set.** **Some of the images don’t have dates – because I haven’t been able to find them. Some of them are postcards people have given me, some well known and not so well-known works of art. And … the disclaimer – I might not know everything about the artists featured but that might be an invitation for you to look them up.**

**So, what do you see within one or all of them which resonates with you today? (repeat).**

I invite you to look at the images in your groups. Spend a few minutes in silence just looking and then choose whichever ones stand out for you or speak to you. It doesn’t matter if you choose one that someone else likes too.

* **First, talk together about what you see.**
* **Then continue to think about how you might use any of the images in ministry, and specifically in the context of prayer.**
* **If you were going to use this kind of way into prayer or ministry in your own contexts remember, you don’t need to be an art expert, you don’t need prior knowledge although like any reference to scripture it’s always good to have found out a little which is easy to do these days. But it is about the here and now, the equivalent of reader response.**
* Talk about ***Grayson Perry’s Art Club* (11)** One of the programmes I became obsessed with in lockdown was Grayson Perry’s Art Club. Perry has become a bit of a national treasure, but I found huge solace and humanity within this series where the artist (Perry is a potter, tapestry maker and artist) who came from humble beginnings invited the public to submit their own works of art. Each week this would be around a very ordinary theme – something which everyone could relate too – “The view from my window” or “Holidays.” Grayson picked a selection of these, often, when allowed, visited the artists in situ and listened to the story of their lives.
* Eloise Rougeon ***For Future Reference: It’ll be OK*** *“I created this self-portrait as I felt like I was going through a monotonous cycle when job searching; apply, be rejected, repeat. Being creative helped me deal with this rejection, disappointment, along with other hardships she faced at the time.”*
* People were many and varied and I found Perry to be incredibly affirming of people’s artistic endeavours. Many of the participants were really struggling with lack of work, mental health or disability issues. Though art, **so much genuine spirituality was unlocked**, as was pastoral care and good humour. Art is powerful and shows us who we are becoming through God’s grace and what a transformative medium the visual is when carefully and prayerfully used. These artworks often felt like genuine prayers from those who made them.
* **Silence Slides 16/22/23**
* **Light and Darkness Slides 17/24/25**
* **Hospitality Slides 18/26**
* **Reverence Slides 19/27**
* **Relationships Slides 20/28**
* **All the is not right Slides 21**