

LIVING IT OUT

SESSION 14 A BIT OF SOD

In the 1600s, Acadians beheld the raw beauty and tremendous potential in the geography along the north shore of Nova Scotia. With their sweat equity and by their fearless determination, they reclaimed marshlands for orchards and farms, pallet of sod by pallet of sod. For nearly 150 years, they made their home peacefully with the Mi'kmaqs and with the land that became a fertile valley.

The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) gave England Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and allowed Isle Royale (Cape Breton) and Isle Saint Jean (Prince Edward Island) to remain under French rule. All the Acadians, largely French in origin, had to do was swear allegiance to the British crown. The allegiance of these Catholics was to God, community (Acadie), family, and neutrality.

In 1755, Acadian families were ripped apart and Acadians, except a few who escaped, were deported to Virginia and other states on the eastern seaboard, Protestant England, what is now Louisiana, and other destinations. (The Acadians who were deported to Louisiana are the people many know as Cajuns.) Their homes and land in Nova Scotia were burned. Of the more than 6,000 who were deported, many died en route. Most who survived the perilous journey met obstacles of disease and resistance on a new shore. Most of all, they were not "home."

Nine years later, Acadians were given permission to return with the stipulation that they settle in small groups in a different part of the colony. Ninety-two years later, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Evangeline" brought international attention to the travesty of the deportation.

A monument of this fictional character (based on the story of an engaged couple separated by the deportation) who represents hundreds of real people stands at Grand Pré, Nova Scotia. The church at Grand Pré holds a magnificent stained glass window in vibrant cobalt and turquoise intersected with small tributaries of red. A Cajun man from Louisiana created this depiction of people leaving in boats. Down a path from the church stands a rustic stone and mortar cross. The stones were retrieved from the foundations of the houses that were burned in 1755.

For Your Spiritual Journal:

Where in the world do you behold beauty and potential?

Where in your faith life have you taken bit of sod and, with God's help, reclaimed fertile soil?

Where and how in your life have you assisted someone else with this endeavor?

Have you ever stood firm in peace in the face of violence or threat? What was that like? How did you feel God's presence with you?

If you have not had that experience, what do you think it might be like for you?

Have you ever taken something broken or in disrepair in any fashion and retrieved it/ altered it for the good of many? What was that like?

Where do you know of people embattled over homeland? How can you be an instrument of peace and justice?

Examen

The Ignatian Examen, used by Jesuits for nearly 500 years, can be a powerful spiritual exercise for us. It is a tool that leads us through grateful, careful reflection illuminated by God's love and presence. Often people use this once or twice a day, at bedtime or midday and bedtime.

An abbreviation of the examen:

1. Remember/acknowledge you are in the presence of God.
2. Spend time gratefully remembering details of your day.
3. Ask for help to see your actions, motives, inactions honestly.
4. Review your day in detail. (This is not a time to berate oneself, but to allow God's grace to shed a light on the ways you were a beacon of hope and the ways your actions missed the mark. Ask God to challenge, encourage, and teach you.)
5. Spend time pouring out your heart to God – gratitude, asking for clarity or help, asking for courage to take stands, be a witness, become more generous and hospitable, to have the hard places of your heart softened.

Prayer

God of All Life, your have given us the senses to behold the wonders of your creation. Help us be wise stewards of the world. Thank you for those who have preserved portions of the natural world that cannot be enjoyed by anyone. Convict our hearts and practices that we might see the ways we are wasteful, the ways we threaten the earth and its inhabitants. Form us into your people of peace with courage to be steadfast in our allegiance to you and your way of love. This we pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

– Cynthia Langston Kirk

