



# Rumblings from the Bunker

## 'JUST SIT THERE, AND KEEP QUIET!'

'Sit there and keep quiet!' How often did you hear that as a child? Or a variation of it. 'Children should be seen and not heard'. Sometimes it might have been more specific. 'You hav'nt a note in your head' or 'you can't dance, you have no rhythm'. Most of us have some experience of having been shut up or shut down. It is likely that when it first happened it was an unpleasant experience. This could range from mild embarrassment to deep hurt. In some instances this was made worse because the 'put down' was done in public, say in a classroom, or worse still in the school assembly hall.

It would be easy to be hard on the adults who behaved in this way, particularly when we apply today's standards and awareness to what happened back then. Whether this is fair or not is debatable. What is objectively true is that such an approach was not good educational practice. Humiliation cannot be dressed up as character building. Even if we accept that we all have different talents and abilities and we cannot be good at everything there is a way of communicating that. We are not all good footballers. We are not all good singers. We are not all good artists. However we are all entitled to our dignity. Just as we would react to someone's good name being damaged so too we acknowledge that anything that damages our self-esteem is also reprehensible.

On the other hand we can never underestimate the power of the word of encouragement. The psychologist Carl Rogers has a great phrase, he speaks of 'unconditional positive regard'. In English we have the notion of more bees being caught by a spoonful of honey than the barrel of vinegar. Of course in our own Irish vocabulary we have the beautiful 'Mol an Óige agus tíochofaidh sí!' (literally: Praise youth and they come with you)

On the question of being shut down or shut up I have been wondering recently about the way things have gone in many of our churches in relation to both noise and silence. The more I thought about it, the more it started to look like a riddle or a conundrum. It might go something like this:

***How come in Church today there is great chat about anything and everything  
and a deafening silence in place of the sacred responses?***

In a sense pagan babble has ousted the sacred dialogue. Or is this too harsh? Is this too simplistic? I do not have a secret readymade answer that I want to lead you to. I do have questions, considerations and possibly some theory about this very interesting phenomenon. This is something I have experienced on a number of occasions in various churches around the country. It goes something like this:

As people gather before Mass there is a growing chorus of chat. With some it's just a few quick murmured sentences of greeting or a brief mutual update, whilst with others it's more sustained and continues apace all the while growing in volume. Whatever about the first of these being understandable and arguably acceptable the latter is more akin to the market place.

It's not so much that the growing din is in some vague way disrespectful to the sacred space, it's much more serious than that. As this din grows it causes two very specific, and in my view, very serious problems. The first of these is that those who are trying to talk to the Lord, that is engage in the serious business of prayer, find it increasingly difficult to do so. I say serious business because oftentimes it is actually life and death. A loved one dying, a dear one missing or in trouble or sometimes the person themselves desperately needing the Divine ear. The second problem is at least as serious and perhaps more so. This is where the Lord is speaking to the person and it's almost impossible to hear him over the deafening din.

Now I totally accept that there is no intended malice in any of this. I think it's more likely a mixture of ignorance, in the best sense of that word, and thoughtlessness. However neither of these, nor the combination of both, detract from the seriousness of the problem. Further to this when it comes to the silence that meets the sacred greetings, such as 'The Lord be with you', again there is no intended malice. Again but evidence of the growing gap between faith and practice.

