26 April

This week, clergy from Connor Diocese have been in England in the Lake District for four days on a retreat. Every two or three years we visit a wonderful place called Cumbrae, just about 2 miles from Ambleside.

Retreat sounds like a fairly negative word - moving away from the reality of life into the cloistered enclosure of a world far removed from all the complexities of parish life. There is certainly that aspect to a retreat. We are encouraged to leave behind mobile phones and emails and focus on God and our relationship with him. We are to slow down a little because for most of us whether we are clergy or not, life is lived at a very fast pace.

From the moment our alarm goes off in the vicarage at 6.30 and we are wakened by the dulcet tones of Connor, Karen or Mark and we catch up on the price of a hogget or the value of the euro, right through the day until the news at midnight, we rarely have a moment for silence and contemplation. We are constantly surrounded with and bombarded by noises of different levels of nuisance and distraction.

There is a wonderful story of a man who visited his place of worship each evening on the way home from work. Every day he would simply sit in silence for 15 or 20 minutes. He didn’t read a bible, study a prayer book or recite a rosary, he just sat there. This intrigued his minister. One day he asked him, ‘John every day you come in and you just sit, what is it that you do?’ ‘Well your reverence,‘ John replied, ‘I look at God and he looks at me.’

‘Be still and know that I am God’ is a piece of advice that was written over three thousand years ago and is still wise counsel today. God our Father needs us to be still so that he can look at us and we can look at him. When I am on retreat I hope that the time will refresh me and remind me of how precious I am to God my Father and also remind me of how little time I set aside each day to be in his presence. I am fortunate to be in a job which allows me the flexibility to set aside time each day for contemplation. In the busyness of all that lies ahead this for you this day, I hope you will find an opportunity for your own spiritual refreshment.