

*Bev McDonald**MM*

Today I want to share with you some excerpts from a book by Vinita Hampton Wright, a catholic writer, and the book is 'Days of Deepening Friendship.' Now sometimes when we talk about gifts, the first thing we go is 'ugh!'

I certainly was in my late thirties really before I could acknowledge that I had any decent gifting's. Perhaps those of you who are younger, may have grown up in a more positive environment than me, and I hope so, but I think all of us struggle a bit with recognizing our own gifting's.

Some of it comes down to our idea of God himself. Is God a rigid judge who makes everything some kind of puzzle to be figured out, or do we really believe that God is good? That God loves us? And that when he says that a good father won't give his children a stone when they ask for bread, can we believe it? If we don't believe that God is truly on our side, life can feel like a tremendous battle or a complicated quiz where we always have to score points. It's important to realise that Mary also, is constantly, praying for us and calling us to relax into who we really are.

Vinita says our own deep loves and desires, point the way to our best gifts. That's really quite a huge statement, because so many of us feel like we have to 'grow up'. What did you really enjoy doing as a child before the adult world encroached upon you? Are you doing now, in any form, what you used to enjoy doing so much back then, and if not, why not? We know the story of how Jesus, at age twelve, slipped away from his parents and spent three days in the temple, listening and debating with the scholars. Now it's doubtful, that he suddenly landed in the temple, and discovered a love for scripture at age twelve. He probably had a deep love for the sacred text of Judaism that he developed from his earliest days, as a little boy at his mothers' knee and with St Joseph.

So many of us grow up, somehow with a sense of what we should do; what we should enjoy; what we should allow our children to do. Maybe you're an artist and you grew up thinking that it was really important that you become a business person because that's how you could provide. Maybe you were mad keen on sports and spent all your time outside, running, jumping, playing, while your family happened to be much more into academic interests and wanted you inside, and focusing much more on those kind of pursuits. The truth is, that being true to our own giftedness is always likely to produce some negative pressure from others or from the world around us. The culture we live in values some gifts more than others, but God is not like that. We need to really be aware of how we value the

gifts of others as well. It can be vitally important to recognize, and 'call out,' the giftedness in one another. Realistically, we live in a culture of celebrity. Those who can speak well, those have leadership or very visible roles tend to be esteemed higher than those who have hidden gifts. But it begins with us. We need to deeply value who we are. Maybe you're a working mother with very little time for hobbies and your job is okay, and it's bringing in money, but it's not situated within your giftedness. You discover a deep desire within you to study – physics, Math's, architecture, music – you may have the full support from your family, but somehow, deep inside yourself, you wonder if you're crazy, if it's reasonable to do it, and we need to be really open with God about that.

Vinita says: God has designed us to be energized through our giftedness and that the writer of Ephesians says that God gives us gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ. Giftedness, when it is graced, is always something that flows through us, for others. It's never a selfish thing to be a gifted musician and bring all that beauty to the world. It's never a selfish thing to be an amazing gardener and bring all of that beauty and fruitfulness to the world and to share it. And so you can add all your own examples. Vinita goes on to say, that she remembers the movie, *'Chariots of Fire'* when missionary, and Olympic runner, Eric Liddell, says, in defense of his running – "God made me fast - and I feel God's pleasure when I run." Each of us can ask; when do I feel God's pleasure?

From another source I want to share with you three points that help us recognize our gifts. One is that we feel a deep inner desire and a satisfaction - that Eric Liddell moment of *'I feel God's pleasure*. The second identifier is that others recognize that gifting in you. Who among you writes the perfect words in the little tribute card? Who among you is the right person to ask to make a meal? Or to look after children? People around us know far more than we imagine about our gifting's and we need to listen to one another and also acknowledge the gifts in one another.

Finally, to be a true gift from God, our gift has to be effective. I had a Math's teacher once, who was quite brilliant. But he couldn't teach children and eventually, he left teaching. He desired to be a teacher, and his gifting was not in the area of teaching. So you get the idea. Three things: – your own natural desire and interests; true effectiveness; and other people acknowledging that gift.