



The little church on top of the hill was packed with pilgrims, who overflowed down the steps and into the village square as the Mass was broadcast via loudspeaker to the whole of the community.

People were everywhere: Christians trying to get into the church; tourists from all over the world, who had heard, like us, about the pageantry of this annual saint's day; stalls selling food & drink, trinkets and relics; musicians setting up to serenade the people

and make a buck.

In the midst of this vibrant festival Andrew and I waited, with hundreds of others, for the Mass to end so we could see the procession. As we listened to the words of the Lord's Supper coming over the loud speaker in Portuguese we tried to guess where the service was up to; 'are they saying the creed?'; 'that must be the Lord's prayer!', but as we laughed and joked with strangers in the crowd we became aware of a man standing quietly among us. With eyes closed and head bowed he spoke every word of the Mass, oblivious to the throng and the noise that surrounded him. It was a strangely beautiful moment, for as his lips moved with prayers so well-known they were a part of his being, we were drawn in as eavesdroppers of something sacred and holy. We felt for a moment that, despite all of the human commotion around us, we were on holy ground; God was present in our midst; incarnate in a pilgrim's prayers.

Back home, our holiday seems a long time ago. September is in full flow as groups and activities begin again and the diary fills up with meetings. However the memory of that 'God moment' experienced amidst the hustle and bussle of life is very precious, because it reminds me that in the midst of all my business, despite all the hectic activity, God can still be realised. The sacred and the secular are one, for God is present in both; we just need to realise him.

So in all that life holds for you this autumn - whether it is new beginnings or frenetic schedules; whether it is uncertainty or anxious waiting; or perhaps it is just 'life as normal' - always remember that the sacred is not just found within a church but that God promises to be with us at each moment of our life, if only we will open our eyes to see him and our hearts to know him.

Helen