RUMBLINGS FROM THE BUNKER
(a Pastor scribbles)

UP ON THE BARRICADES

I'm a child of the Troubles. It probably explains a lot. When I was seven years old the British Army arrived on our streets. We went out and greeted them with cakes and buns. They took the riot gear off, stacked their rifles in our little gardens, rolled up their sleeves and enjoyed the hospitality. It was August 1969. They were our heroes. They had come to protect us from those 'nasty prods' over on the Shankill. By Christmas the cake was gone and we were pelting them with petrol bombs and by the following summer they never appeared again in our street without their riot gear. They had turned their guns on us. Ten years later as I got ready to leave home and join religious life, the hunger strikers were dying, fresh martyrs leading to numerous IRA recruits. How we hated Thatcher. The year before we had cheered in school on hearing that Lord Louis Mountbatten was blown to smithereens in Mullaghmore. Cruel days filled with blind hate.

As I reflect on those days now I marvel at the influence of education, the impact of travel and the power of the Holy Spirit. I thank God for those who modelled love and compassion and understanding. Somewhere in there my faith journey germinated and my vocation story was honed and fashioned.

A feature of life back then was the barricade. I'm not sure how to describe it. The dictionary definition of 'an impoverished barrier erected across a street to prevent or delay the movement of opposing forces' is somehow a little more grandiose than the reality I recall. The barricades I remember were messier affairs. Oftentimes it was a mix of a burnt out car, or bread van, a milk lorry or even a bus. Loads of rubble and spikes and glass. They were usually manned by fourteen year olds not quite sure why they were angry, uncertain as to what exactly love was, and as yet not softened nor saved by loss or a broken heart.

Today I am reflecting on the barricades in the heart. My heart. Your heart. The barricades in your heart were most likely built a long time ago. They were built from loss, disappointment and hurt. From broken dreams not broken glass. Old barricades, especially the ones in the heart, are held together by resentment and bitterness. Where are the barricades in your life, in your home, in your relationships? To whom do you say 'thus far and no further'? Do you want to continue to do this? Do you do it freely? Would you like it to be different? Maybe it's time to take the barricades down....

Fraternally, JoeMcD 24. 08. 25