24-7 PRAYER IN THE LORETTO COMMUNITY, AUSTRIA: DR MAXIMILLIAN OETTINIGEN

Shortly after Pentecost 2010, my friend Georg approached me with a red book and said emphatically, "Maxi, please read this!" I had another book on my bedside table so I gave the red book to my wife to read. The next morning she said to me, "Maxi, I've finished the book. Please read it!" So naturally, I started to read...

I was fascinated. It was a book about friends who started to dream and pray in England; they prayed in ways they'd never done before - by day and by night - they prayed in the most surprising places. That red book is called Red Moon Rising, by Pete Greig, and is the story of how 24-7 Prayer was birthed, and how it spread like a wild fire across the whole world.

Just after this, my friend mentioned that a man named Johannes Hartl was about to start a house of prayer in Augsburg, Germany – a place where Jesus would be worshipped day and night and especially with music. So we went to visit and were fascinated again.

Georg and I work for the Loretto community which started as a prayer group in 1987. Since 2004, I've been leading Loretto as a community leader. We decided to invite Johannes to come to Herbsttage, one of our smaller festivals in Vienna. 6 months later, Pete Greig came to our Pfingstkongress, one of the biggest festivals in Salzburg, and he and Johannes became good friends.

It became clear to us that God was wanting to give us something new – in particular a new intensity in prayer and a new passion for Jesus. We've been leading and organising prayer groups since we started; mainly young people gathering weekly to worship, do catechesis and Eucharistic prayer. We've always prayed. But 24 hours a day? 7 Days a Week? During the day and night? Wasn't that too radical? Our minds said yes, but our hearts said no – so we faced an uncomfortable decision.

In John's gospel it explains how Mary took perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet – others were offended by the waste and said it was too radical and generous. The Bible has many examples when “wasteful” worship was normal – King David introduced the idea of day and night worship; Jesus himself prayed at night; Paul said we should pray without ceasing. In church history we see again and again movements characterised by continuous prayer – 24-7.
To us it became more and more obvious: where there is a lot of prayer, heaven is open. Isn’t this exactly what Jesus talks about when he teaches us to pray? “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” What is in heaven shall spread across the earth - not the other way around. So where there is a lot of prayer, we invite heavenly reality to be released on earth.

So in August 2010, we tried a first small step towards 24-7 Prayer with a seemingly insignificant meeting. We organised three days of non-stop 24-7 prayer; a different person took each hour but sometimes a few more people worshipped together. We then had our first full 24-7 week in Salzburg in October 2010, quickly followed by three more. We had our first 2-7 week in Vienna in 2011, again several followed. Alongside this we had prayer days and weeks in Loretto across Austria.

One thing became very clear – young people are thirsty for God, and they learn to pray by praying. It all starts with a desire for God – for Jesus. A longing for more time with the King.