



# Spiritual Reflection

– Father Alan Roberts



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**He toka tū moana he ākinga nā ngā tai.**

*Steadfast as the rock that scorns the lashing tides.*

**You are always there for me.**

In reflecting on this saying, my mind goes to Opunake beach in Taranaki. This crescent shaped beach, no wider than a few hundred metres, is bordered by huge cliffs on either side. The name (o puna kē) means, the place where the springs have always been). The waves are always interesting, and on the northern side, some distance from the shore, one can view the powerful waters lashing the rocks around an old wharf which seems to have been there forever. Opunake beach was my family's annual holiday place during my childhood. This year I have been able to spend a few hours out there each week. Little has changed and certainly the rocks and the lashing waves have not.

Dr Elder in her book, Aroha, reflects on the value of steadfast friends. They are like rocks, always there. Friendships are vital for people in all walks of life. We are blessed indeed if we can maintain them for a long period of time, and certainly blessed if they are there at crisis moments, those times when the waves of fortune seem set on destroying us.

The founder of Christianity certainly had very deep friendships, both male and female. The women were his strength and faithful to the end. That this is revealed in the gospels surely contains some wisdom about life we are meant to discover: *“near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala” (Jn19: 25-27).*

Sometimes I liken the V de P society to those rocks of Opunake beach. I recall a time, while parish priest in Blenheim, when a young couple who had been travelling around the South Island now needed money for a boat ticket home, as well as enough for petrol. I had to wonder what type of planning this pair had done for their trip! Now, in the midst of this difficult situation they thought of the Church, and I was Johnny on the spot! Think for a moment of just how much they were asking: the expenses for a ferry ticket for two, their car and a tank of petrol. But sure enough, the V de P came to my aid, and the couple drove off into the evening sun!

It is easy to be judgmental in cases like this, but not everyone has their act together. Not everyone has been raised to plan carefully for the future. This couple might be described as a bit 'rough and ready'. At one point they had enough money for a time away, so, don't worry about the logistics!

Some people are simply swept along in pretty powerful waves. If they don't smash into rocks, God alone knows what damage they might do. When we become judgmental, the rocks are nothing more than lumps of sand.

For our friends in the story, there was no note of thanks, no effort to repay. Hopefully they have an imprint in their minds that the Church, and therefore God, is about compassion, which means to 'suffer with', not begrudgingly, but as a friend. If so, in the case above, the V de P is God's instrument, powerfully, albeit quietly, revealing this friendship nature of God. Hopefully also, our new friends might go on to help someone else out in the future. The poor usually do.