

Collect of the Day

Almighty God,
whose only Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence:
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

There is a saying that purports to come from China that is sometimes referred to as the Chinese curse – May you live in interesting times.

We certainly live in interesting times. The Brexit saga continues to run on and all the uncertainty that that brings. We are still coming to terms with the impact social media has on our society, on the way we do politics, on the way we receive our news. Over the last three or four years we have seen a rise in populism, the influence of far right groups who have managed to use this new phenomenon far more effectively. We are hearing louder voices that speak of prejudice, a distrust of those who are different, those of a different culture, different lifestyle.

This summer when we were in France we spent a week in Taize, taking part, as we have done on many occasions, in their programme of worship, Bible Study and discussions. Each year is different, different people, different cultures, different insights. There is a different theme for each year. Brother Alois, the Prior of the community produces a letter each year. This year it was entitled ‘Let us not forget hospitality!’ – partly in response to pressures in the world to promote division in society.

We begin with that simple statement of the nature of God that we find in the 1st Letter of John – ‘God is love’. Love is about relationships. There is a lover and a beloved – in that the lover is the beloved of the other and the beloved is the lover of the other.

I see this God coming to us and us coming to God in worship reflected in the words of the Collect of today:

Almighty God,
whose only Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence:
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;

Now put this in terms of hospitality. God welcomes us when we approach him in worship. We may be awkward, we may be not sure of what we are doing, what to say, what to think – but God welcomes us, delights in our presence. And at the same time, we welcome God's presence among us in worship. The lover and the beloved delighting in each other's presence.

Now there would follow on from this, that if you and I are both loved by God, welcomed by God – then there should be an openness to one another.

God is love. Love conferred on all – on saint and sinner, on faithful and unfaithful; a love not to be earned or deserved, a love freely offered. Those of us who have grasped something of that simple truth are called to share it.

The writer to the Hebrews, as he comes to the end of his letter, writes:

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. *Hebrews 13:2*

Jesus, in his teaching, in his actions calls us to an openness that is generous and inclusive; one that goes beyond the boundaries of the familiar, that expects

nothing in return. In Luke's Gospel, we read of Jesus saying to those who had invited him to dinner:

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” *Luke 14 12ff*

Something done not because we are obliged to, not to advance an agenda. But simply because it is right. We begin to incarnate, however imperfectly, something of the unconditional love of God who welcomes us in Christ, whom we invite into our hearts in worship.

This is something that is done both individually and on a community basis. And I just want to close my thoughts with a project that has been gaining momentum in recent months. Last year we welcomed Rory O'Neill of the Irish Refugee Council to one of our Family Communion Services. He put out an idea that Howth, Sutton, Baldoyle as a community would be prepared to welcome a family of Syrian Refugees being brought to Ireland as part of this country's commitment to play its part in responding to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Syria. A group was subsequently formed, drawn from all the Churches and beyond. It is hoped, that before long, we will be in a position to welcome such a family to live in our midst.

I spoke earlier of voices that speak of division, that foster suspicion of the different, those on the outside – this is an opportunity for us as a community to raise a voice for inclusion, for hospitality, for hope for those who have known great trauma.

As much as you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters you did it to me.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.