

One of the features of many of our churches is our use of stained glass. We have beautiful windows here in St Mary's. The one over the communion table is the one most of us see every Sunday. It is magnificent, rich in symbolism, expressing the historic links between this Parish and the St Lawrence family in Howth Castle as well as references to ancient Irish Church in this land, featuring both local saints such as St Fintan and St Assam and the national figures of Patrick and Brigid, all focussing on the figure of the risen Christ in the centre. I must admit I love the window at the font and also the one behind the communion table at the back. Of course if you go into the great cathedrals of Europe such as Chartres or Notre Dame in Paris the windows are even more magnificent, as in a series of pictures a particular window will tell the story of a parable of Jesus, or the life of a particular saint. They have their origins in a time when few people could read – the windows were the story book through which people learned and reflected on the faith.

One of the other great artistic traditions was the design and painting of icons, which are very much a feature of the orthodox tradition. These stylised pictures of great figures of the Old Testament, of Christ and his disciples are designed as aids to prayer and reflection. There is one that I very much associate with the Taize community in France, it is the figure of Christ standing alongside a disciple with an arm around his shoulder.



The figure of Christ holds a copy of the Gospels, the right hand of the disciple is raised in blessing and both are looking at us. As I look at that I think of Christ with me, accompanying me in daily life, as a companion, an encourager, as a friend.

Then I look at the first of the two passages we read today – from the letter of Paul to the Philippians. Here Paul is not talking about listening to Christ, not even admiring Christ, he is talking about being Christ-like, having the same mind, being Christ for one another. Look back at that picture, the figure of Christ, holding the Gospel arm around another. How can I be Christ for someone in this coming week?

Let's just think of a couple of examples in daily living. Yesterday was one of those occasions that I enjoy – I was officiating at a wedding down in Co Meath. It is lovely watching a young couple prepare for their big day and talking over with them some of their hopes and plans for their life ahead. We also talk about facing problems, resolving difficulties, supporting each other, standing alongside each other in the sorrows we all have to face in life. I often think back to the time Rachel and I were married and I read a book, 'The Courage to be Married'. One expression that has stayed with me ever since, as the author spoke of a man and wife making Christ present for one another; being Christ for one another; presenting each other with an image of Christ.

It is a while before some of you are going to be getting married. But I was thinking back to a service some of our young people offered within the last year. Does anyone remember these classes?



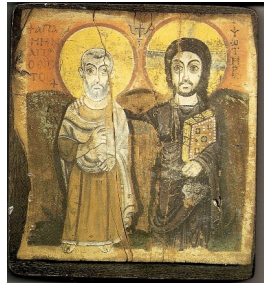
I recall a great atmosphere in the computer suite in the Burrow in which both the youngsters and those grappling with the computers encouraged and affirmed one another – a simple example of a service given and received.

Then there are just those times we come together here in Church to worship together and to enjoy each others company in the Parish Centre and outside. This picture, taken a couple of years ago now, sums up for me the lovely atmosphere of fellowship that spans the ages that we so often experience in this place.



We have gathered together and we have worshipped together and in that space there is room for listening to one another, encouraging one another and simply enjoying one another – who knows what simple gifts are given and received in those times we share together, in which we can be Christ, encounter Christ, receive from Christ.

I leave you with that first picture.



And with it a question – who can I be Christ to in this coming week, this coming month, in my home, my community, my school or place of work. May God take each one of us and use us to show something of his love in this world in which we live.