

Reflection for Sunday 6th September

Information moves very quickly, and we learn about what is happening in our country and internationally soon after it has taken place. The impact of the events described is also swift. Back in the 17th Century John Donne wrote that *'no man is an island'* and we recognise now more than ever how dependent we are on one another. If we consider something very modern such as a 'supply chain', by the time something gets into our real or virtual shopping basket it has passed through many hands. Our modern world is complex, interlinked and quick, although you might say that this has always been the case, I think it is the speed and complexity of our exchanges worldwide that are special features of our world today. In fact, as I am writing this reflection, I also have half an eye on another window of my desktop which is the live stream from the Grotto in Lourdes – a nice sunny day there, rain here! Many miles away, but also just a couple of 'clicks'. Anyway, this reflection is not about the weather, it is about the speed and access of communication and its consequences for our dependence on one another.

Mindful that what we think, do, and say has its effects on others the readings from Ezekiel and the Gospel, confront us with the need to challenge others about their behaviour. Is there anyone of us who finds this easy? All too aware of our own faults and failings we do not want to appear to be self-righteous. Perhaps we should add that we are often cautious about other people's reaction. So, this type of conversation is usually reserved for family, close friends, and the professional sphere, unless there is something really damaging going on, in which case we refer to those in authority or other specialists. That said, I have met people who seem to be able to challenge others on sensitive issues effectively, guided by the Holy Spirit, and working from the depth of their own spirituality.

But given the circumstances of our world today do we also need to consider challenges to collective human behaviour? Those who challenge us as a society are not perfect and do not always appear to have the grace that soothes our sensitivities whilst at the same time laying down challenges, we feel that we can engage with. It is not always possible to agree with all the actions of those pursuing racial and gender equality, poverty, or action on climate change, but they and others, are important issues to be addressed. There is room for disagreement on how these and other difficulties should be tackled, but to turn a deaf ear to them is not going to allow us to make progress together. If driving my car in a crowded city adds to high levels of pollution at the school gate, maybe I can make alternative travel arrangements or at least cut the ignition when in a queue of traffic. If through my actions I am part of the problem, then, maybe, I can be part of the solution as well – but someone may well need to point this out to me, and sign post the solution. I hope I would react well.

Jesus encourages us to tackle wrongdoing. Pope Francis has challenged us on several fronts including evangelisation and the environment. Here he is in *Laudato Si*: *"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organisations committed to raising awareness of these challenges. Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis has proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation, or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity. As the bishops of Southern Africa have stated 'Everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation.' All of us can*

cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvement and talents.”¹

The words of Jesus about two or three gathering in his presence to ask for something good should give us great confidence in our work and prayer together for a more sustainable and just future.

God bless you, Canon David

¹ Laudato Si, Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, May 2015, in On Care for our Common Home with commentary by Sean McDonagh, Orbis Books 2016