

TRINITY 3

I want to share with you the latest news of Brother Marc (who lives and prays in the Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield): that he has been accepted to follow the pathway to Ordination with his training to become a deacon and then priest. He is relieved and delighted and wanted you all to know, and to keep him in your prayers!

You will see from our prayer list today, it is that time of year again (around Peter-tide) when we think of those being newly ordained and that mixture of dread and joy which every Christian calling brings.

One of the biggest fears for this year's candidates: "Will I be accepted, liked, valued even by the parishioners I haven't even met yet?" ... "Will I get on well with the clergy team? Will they encourage me and help me to grow in confidence and faith?"

One of the many joys: It is the last line of today's challenging Gospel reading: "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." In Marc's case, that calling to be first a monk has already been tested and continues to be tested in a working, praying community for every day of the week and not just on Sundays. You may recall that as well as showing off his beautiful singing voice, he has the responsibility of being the 'doctor of the house' – not literally - but he is the one who does all the fetching and carrying for the sick and elderly brothers; he has to deal with those times when some are grumpy and others are too demanding; sometimes he would have little or no sleep, and other times feel the need for very long walks to escape all the everyday demands and occasional upsets. You won't be surprised if I told you that brothers have the same kinds of fall-outs as we do; like any family or church family, it happens and sulking can be very tiring if it is kept up for too long; better to forgive one another, to say sorry, to move on.

At the heart of all Christian vocation, especially as lay people, is to take up Christ's invitation to let him lead you and let him take you on whichever journey that you follow – to love service, to love the role of the deacon, and to be the encourager and 'doer' who gets things done in that family of God, this family of God. And to get to that wonderful place of letting go, you have to learn to love yourself and stop carrying around anything that feels or looks like 'guilt', that most worthless and negative of emotions. Each of our vocations has to be a source of happiness and growing discernment and, yes, wisdom. Each of our vocations need to reflect God's love in and for us – and shine out as a beacon for others.

We all have good days and bad days, times of challenge and times of disappointment; some of us are shy and quiet when others appear to be the opposite, confident and strident. The rest of us are somewhere in between? Those of you who serve on our PCC will know what I mean! We are a mixed bag which is, of course, part of God's choosing and, indeed, sense of humour! If I was preaching at the Ordination services I would have to say that humour is almost more vital than the air we breathe, just as our smiles are. "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

I think something I personally need more of is the companionship of prayer partners, even if, like on Sunday night, just a few gather in our chapel to say the evening office together. I am hoping to put on daily evening prayer here before too long so that it becomes more mainstream, more habitual like eating or drinking, more relaxed and conversational in style – because God knows our every need before we utter any words at all. But He enjoys our company as much as we enjoy one another's. God desires, His light and presence to be shared and for that still, small voice to be heard before the demands of the coming week so easily take over. Think of this communal prayer as a space, a pause and a gap where great things can happen...

On this World Refugee Sunday, I have been known in recent days, to tell God off and let go that these recent drownings in Greek waters just have to stop happening! The sinfulness of human trafficking has to be found out and stopped. The abuses and the blackmail have to stop. And I hear God reply each time: 'Don't blame me.' We sometimes throw all the pain and disbelief back onto God in our praying, don't we? We accuse him of sitting back and not caring enough or else we demand that He intervenes and rescues us from every tragedy. That's why some of our intercessions in public sound like the latest news headlines as if God hasn't caught up with it all or worse still, God isn't interested.

So I want to end with where I really began:

That our Christian calling is pure gift and that as well as prayer, at source it demands our passion, our energy, and as much love that we can muster. Of course, some biblical and theological study and reflection is needed just as attending what can sometimes feel to be dull committee or planning meetings, are needed...

The life of a lively and caring church has to have all that practical, organizing help going on in the background and has to have people absolutely committed to that practical, deacon-role of service, and of quiet faithfulness. It is this which speaks volumes and, which turns around the apathy and injustices of this world to create something new and altogether special – our common vocation and life in Christ, rooted and grounded in Him, our shared calling to be living lights in the world and, to make a difference. I end with Reinhold Niebhur's inspirational words you will remember:

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

AMEN.

