

TRINITY 6

I am not sure if this is sad or hopeful. It is certainly honest. In this week's Church Times, actor Martin Freeman, is quoted from a national newspaper:

"I'm not a practising Catholic, but I still like popping into churches to offer one up, light a candle, do all that stuff. I'm certainly one of the only people in my family who would ever unironically go into a church."

Perhaps the sad part is that the Church is still thought to be by so many a bit like libraries used to be thought of when we were children – these were places where you literally tip-toed around – seen, yes, but certainly not heard! There is no sense of every day, living, breathing family noises here or any sense that there may be mature understanding of the church as very ordinary people of God.

Perhaps the hopeful part is that, in the actor's understanding, our churches are places which can point us to the sacred, where we can just pop in as he says, and light a candle, pause for a moment and dare to pray silently or aloud.

One of the disciples in our Gospel today asked for guidance in a very simple and natural way, like a child might. And, of course, Jesus obliged with the words we all know so well and recite most often in public. He goes on to explain that we must ask for what we want and what we need each day, whether that be bread or shelter, friendship or company, hospitality or a helping hand. The possibilities for prayer are endless but somehow if we focus more 'in the moment' as

they say and just ‘offer one up’, there is a real sense of conversation going on – straight talking rather than overly long and complicated sentences of the kind that those of us who do this professionally, can sometimes be guilty of! And after all these years, I can honestly say that leading public prayer can still sometimes sound like we are telling God what He already knows! So there are pitfalls not only of wordiness but also of arrogance...

Individual or private prayer may well be equally fraught but I think our Lord would appreciate our actor’s sentiment or, gut instinct, that prayer is something any of us can offer up with or without words as we stumble across God’s presence in our daily living.

In a lovely article, also in the Church Times this week, a well-known travelling writer and priest who prays most easily and best on the train, remarked:

“It struck me that Jesus most often prayed for the benefit of those immediately around him. We will all be familiar with intercessions that sound like a BBC World Service report, or a list of targeted minutiae of government policy, or Synod motions, or local planning law; and yet Christ’s prayers are most regularly not for the abstract or far off, but for those in his actual presence.

So, one morning – inevitably on a train – I simply closed my eyes as the Circle Line rattled back round into the centre of London from Notting Hill Gate, focused on the people and things that I could hear around me, and handed them over to

God: a sort of sacramental eavesdropping, if you will. “Here we go, God,” I said, “over to you”; and started to clear my thoughts and listen.”

At yesterday’s hopeful and tri-lingual meeting in St Mary’s House with our new Ukrainian friends, I did just that, praying silently for different people of all ages that their burdens may feel lighter...that our church community alongside many others, may be a haven of love and solidarity as we grow forward together in practical and helpful ways.

To pray as Jesus taught us, ‘Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses’ is really the best kind of pilgrim prayer to help us travel hopefully together and turn away from any tears or sadness. Choose instead and ‘abound’ as St Paul said, ‘in thanksgiving.’

Amen.