

God bless your home and all who dwell here.

No Man is an Island

All along the road there are houses, basking for a while in the morning sunshine, reflecting the sky and the roofs in their windows. But there is no movement, each is an island unto itself, encircled not by a sea but by lawns, pavements or gravel. It is so eerily quiet that you wonder if there is anyone there. Only occasionally do a dog walker or a couple walk past on their way to the country park for their brief moment of exercise.

And into this experience of life now comes the dedication for today's morning prayer, the commemoration of John Donne, Priest and Poet, the author of Meditation XVII – better known as No Man is an Island.

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man
Is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
Is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
Well as any Manor of thy friends or thine
Own were; any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in Mankind.
And therefore, never send to know for whom
The bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

In just these few lines Donne establishes our connectedness to each other, the way the lives of each of us are intertwined in dependence and that the absence of one has an effect on the whole.

This is so much a poem for today. Suddenly we have been brought to the realisation that every human action has its consequences. Who would have believed that the action of slaughtering a wild animal in a market thousands of miles away would bring about a creeping paralysis of the world?

And we have been made to understand that our actions will have direct consequences, not just to ourselves and our families but to all our neighbours.

Yet an understanding of this is the basis of our Christian Faith. We should not only love God but must love our neighbours as ourselves. And it is the basis of every missionary effort in history – to reveal the love of God, the gift of grace, and the unity of humankind. At the heart of every Christian community is the injunction to act as the Body of Christ and so reveal that love and grace in action.

As St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12; 12-21

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be?

²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

Paul is speaking theologically. He is describing his vision of Christians using the gifts they have received from God to contribute to the life of the church, acting as a valuable part of a united whole. No one gift is more important than another, all contribute to the life of the whole. Donne extends this vision to the whole of humanity – we are all part of this same continent which is humanity – and the loss of any one is suffered by us all, in ways that we can hardly imagine.

In a year in which we will be recalling the end of the Second World War we can use our imaginations to think of all the potential for good that was lost in the deaths of millions, soldiers and civilians. The engineers and scientists, the doctors and researchers, the architects and builders, the artists and musicians, the teachers, the fathers and the mothers, priests – and yes the poets - who were lost – people who could have made such a difference to the way our world has progressed in the following years.

Heavenly Father, as we have time to think about our world and you, gently direct our thoughts to love and to an understanding of the value of every human being in our world. Help us, as the Body of Christ your Son, make a difference in any way we can. Comfort us with your peace and inspire us with your Spirit. We know that you ask of us only what we are capable of giving. And that everything we give, however small it may seem, is of inestimable value to the community around us, held in your everlasting love.

Amen

God bless you and all those you love and pray for, this day and always.
Keep safe, keep well and keep in touch.