

Reflection for 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

Today we celebrate the first Sunday in ordinary time after the season of Easter and the Sundays dedicated to the feast of the Trinity and Corpus Christi. Ordinary may seem a bit strange to us just now. The easing of lockdown and the promises of a horizon being free from restrictions may seem a little further away than many would have hoped for. Patience is being tested as the momentum to return to a life free from all restrictions appears at least to be slowing down and further delays now seem inevitable. However, on the other hand, there is slowly a return to some sort of normality and a freeing from restrictions that have drastically changed our lives. This has come at a cost, for some their employment, for others their health may have suffered physically, emotionally or psychologically. It has been a time of turmoil and uncertainty. Many of us, through the pandemic, have reflected on our faith and may have questioned it as we seek to find answers to new and challenging situations. It has not been easy. It would be foolish to think otherwise. Many have also sought faith through different approaches. Some through online reflections, to find something that may offer them a sense of consolation and hope. There now appears to be light at the end of the tunnel, as the vaccines continue to be rolled out across the country. Faith is also caught up in this as it tries to find its way through the maze of life as it faces the intellectual and emotional challenges of the day. As we move towards the longest day in terms of natural daylight, perhaps these words of Alister McGrath, professor of Science and Religion at Oxford University might help through these days of apparent uncertainty.

“Christianity does not merely offer a new way of beholding our world, but an enhanced capacity to live within that world and cope with its uncertainty and complexity, as well as our own frailty and failings. It enables us to confront glib and shallow accounts of our situation, such as the superficial rationalism of the Enlightenment or the facile optimism of an ideology of ‘positive thinking’ which seeks to exorcise a recognition of the darker and more disrobing aspects of human nature or creation. Reality is complex and ambivalent; wisdom demands that we recognize this, rather than crudely forcing it to be uniformly simple and positive. Intellectual violence is unable to suppress this darker truth about our world, which Christianity has affirmed and confronted rather than implausibly denied.

Wisdom is a form of knowledge that eschews simple and superficial readings of reality, driven by the intolerance of uncertainty. It demands a deep immersion in the paradoxes and problems of living in a world that is resistant to quick and easy interpretations. The ‘wise’ are those who are willing to adapt their patterns of thought and life to this complex world, rather than attempting to force the world to conform to their preconceived ideas. Wisdom demands that we respect and actively embrace a deep mystery, something that transcends the boundaries of human comprehension. G.K. Chesterton declared that, by acknowledging one thing to be mysterious, everything else becomes lucid. As Newton found in setting out the idea of gravity, and Christians in expressing the notion of the Trinity, we often find that something that we do not – and perhaps cannot - fully understand allows us to understand everything else. Paradoxically, mysteries have a remarkable capacity to illuminate.

We do indeed see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12) being captives to our limited capacity to behold and understand, and the fragility of truths on which we base our lives. That’s why we attach ourselves to others for company and solidarity, holding on to a vision of reality and embodiment of wisdom, which in turn holds us, encouraging us to probe and discover its depths and riches. Somehow, the shadows of the cosmos seem softer and more bearable when we journey in company – and in hope, knowing that someone has walked through that darkness before us, blazing a trail that we can follow.”

Alister McGrath, “**Journeys through Science, Faith and Doubt a memoir**” pages 207-208