

16th Sunday after Trinity

8 am Holy Communion, St Mary's, Barnes - Richard Harries

Ephesians 3, 19

Most of us live fairly ordinary lives; most of us are fairly ordinary sort of people. But is the ordinary so ordinary? Perhaps it is redolent with undreamt of possibilities?

R.S. Thomas began one of his early, best loved poems with the lines
'Iago Prytherch his name, though be it allowed,
Just an ordinary many of the bald welsh hills.

He goes on to describe how this hill farmer is rooted in and almost indistinguishable from the fields he ploughs but ends up recognising his capacity for sheer endurance. He ends

Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner of wars,

Enduring like a tree under the curious stars.'¹

So many so called ordinary people struggle on with extraordinary resilience, bravely coping with all manner of difficulties and afflictions.

John Betjeman has an even better known poem about a couple in a bath tea shop

"Let us not speak, for the love we bear one another—

Let us hold hands and look."

She such a very ordinary little woman;

He such a thumping crook;

But both, for a moment, little lower than the angels

In the teashop's ingle-nook.

The most ordinary of us, and even thumping crooks have a capacity for love.

¹ R.S.Thomas, "A Peasant", Collected Poems 1945-1990, Dent 1993, p.4

Today's epistle suggest something even more extraordinary. At the end of a wonderful prayer that we might comprehend the depth and extent of Christ's love for us Paul comes to the climax. "That you might be filled with all the fullness of God." What an extraordinary vocation and destiny we have as human beings-to be filled with all the fullness of God. The mind literally boggles.

This means that our most ordinary daily routine, and most ordinary human relationships, all have the most extraordinary potential. Prayer, said George Herbert is "heaven in ordinary." To live mindfully, to use the current word, reflectively, prayerfully is to suffuse the ordinary with the heavenly. It is to see other people in a new light.

C.S.Lewis once wrote

'There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations-these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit-immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.'²

So let us look again at what seems so ordinary in our life and turn it into a Te Deum. Let us look again at all our dealings and relationships, for through them there is an aperture for the life of God to seep into us.

That Fullness of God is of course first of all in Christ himself, but it is the Christian vocation and life to live so much in him that we too are changed and filled with the fullness of God. He became ordinary, that through him our ordinariness might become extraordinary.

² C.S.Lewis, "The Weight of Glory", Transposition and other Addresses, Geoffrey Bles, 1949, p.32