



*Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

I still need to be saying this, and I want to say it in our current circumstances, partly to remind myself we are still in the Easter season, and partly, I suppose, to convince myself of the reality and hope of Easter.

I've just had a delightful week off, with fantastic weather, and lots of good walking on paths around Exeter I've never used before. Some of you will remember that one Lent I had decided to read Dante's *Inferno* (Hell) in English. I did complete this, and so when I picked up the volume last week, I had reached *Purgatory*: still circles around which Dante and his guide Virgil travel, but going upwards this time. It seemed appropriate reading material to where we are now. My reading and walking taught me two fairly obvious things: that those who are normally generous and self-giving are more generous and self-giving now; those who are self-centred and mean are more self-centred and mean now. And remembering Donald Tusk's comment about Brexiteers, I do wonder if there is some special circle of Hell or Purgatory for those who cycle too fast too close, or for joggers who pass by wheezing and panting.

The message conveyed to us by these two readings seems to be that the early Christian community found fullness of life, abundance of life, in the sharing not just of bread and wine, but of their possessions, so that things were held in common and a surplus given away to those in need. As I have said in the Reflection, it's not hugely obvious who those recipients were, but the John reading is clear about the flock who gather around and follow the one true Shepherd. And reasonably enough, we interpret that as the Christian community.

However, it seems to me that the requirement, the duty inscribed by faith, to share generously, goes much beyond simply those who have Christianity in common. It's as if we said when giving to the Community Larder, for example, please make sure this food only goes to Christians, or to people like us. Put like that, it doesn't sound generous at all. It's akin to a distinction made between the 'deserving' and the 'underserving' poor.

It also doesn't really reflect what we know of God from the Gospels. There we have a God of huge extravagance, profligate almost: particularly in St Luke, with all those lost things (the sheep, the coin, the younger wayward son) and in the rescue provided by the Samaritan to the man mugged on the Jericho road. The final demonstration of God's generosity is seen in Jesus, God's son, a very part of God, who gives ultimately all that he has. He goes to his death for those who for the most part want nothing to do with him, or betray him. Only one of the thieves is grateful, the other just continues the mockery.

In this context, the resurrection proves that generosity on this scale works, and it provides a model. "Look what I can do, and what happens afterwards," God says to us; "You could try it". So we acknowledge on Thursday evenings by clapping those who do, and by keeping silence for those by whom another level of giving has been offered. And finally we might try it ourselves, just a bit more for those who are not 'one of us'. But I acknowledge that it's difficult – I find it difficult to change, to be generous-spirited with joggers and cyclists, which is why I have to carry on saying: Christ is risen, happy Easter!

*Fr David*