

It is I think a fact of ministry that one day is never like the next, and each day is often a bizarre cocktail of very different happenings. Last Wednesday was a case in point.

After an hour and a half at my desk, I celebrated the Eucharist at 10 o'clock in honour of St Clare of Assisi. I then had an unscheduled visit from a young man troubled by the voices of demons in his head, and troubled further by the well meant advice of other Christians. I *finally* got to my next appointment – visiting a member of the congregation for good coffee and exceptionally good homemade biscuits - and from that conversation came some unexpected inspiration. After lunch (for reasons too complex to explain here and now) I spent 3 hours bombing up and down the River Thames on a reinforced inflatable rescue boat – bouncing above the wash of the Clippers and tourist boats at great speed, and on more than one occasion almost being thrown overboard.

Then around 6pm I was dropped off at Hammersmith Bridge, peeled off my lifejacket and dry suit, and made my way to the Hammersmith Apollo to hear the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh speak about 'Global Ethics for Our Future'.

Not a typical day by any means (even for East Barnet!). But in all the activity and variety of last Wednesday, one thing stands out in my memory. After the exuberance of the afternoon on the river, I sat with around three and a half thousand others listening to the quiet, at times barely audible voice of an 84 year old man. And of all the things he said I remember this:

“A piece of bread is an ambassador of the cosmos” (repeat)

He was explaining the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness which has many connections with the Christian contemplative tradition. The sense that in a piece of bread there is the essence of the wheat but also the sun, the soil but also the rain, the toil of the one who sowed the seed and the one who harvests. And all of them are drawn together, embodied, in the end result.

“A piece of bread is an ambassador of the cosmos”

Try to find a 'post-it note' in your brain and just make a note of that there for the time being.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Revised Common Lectionary is too coy to give the feast its full title but none the less, from as early on as the third and fourth centuries the Christian church has taught that the mother of our Lord did not suffer corruption, but at the end of her life – having held a central place in the apostolic community as *The Acts of the Apostles* reminds us – at the end of her life she was assumed bodily into heaven.

Now clearly it **isn't** a biblical *event* - and because of that some Christians find the Assumption problematic. But equally clearly, it **is** a biblical *logic*. The Old Testament teaches us that Enoch and Elijah were *so* close to God in their human lives that they were caught up in the divine glory: in 2 Kings chapter 2, Elijah gets whisked off in his chariot of fire, and in Genesis 5 Enoch walks so closely with God 'that he was no more, God took him'.

Surely as mother of Jesus, God-bearer and co-worker with God the Father in the incarnation, Mary's closeness to God is unparalleled and without rival?

First and foremost the Assumption is a mystery to be *celebrated* in the liturgy of the Church rather than us trying to work out the mechanics of what *might* have happened and *how*. The earliest tradition in the Eastern Church was that Mary died a natural death – one she embraced with joy as she was reunited with Christ – and that after three days she too was resurrected and assumed into heaven. In the words of St John of Damascus, '*as with the Son, so with the Mother*'. The early church taught that Mary's life

became a mirror, following the exact pattern of Christ's. So for us to celebrate the Assumption is to celebrate the very dynamics of the incarnation – the intimate and loving relationship between the Blessed Mother and her Son, Jesus Christ.

As Hebrew love poetry, *The Song of Songs* captivated the imagination of the Church, and provided the language and imagery to describe the relationship between us and God; a relationship with the potential to be as close and intense as that of the Lover and the Beloved, as that of the Mother and the Son. Above all commentators on *The Song of Songs*, it was Bernard of Clairvaux who grasped the importance of this sense of *relationship*. Central to his understanding of God was the sense that the one who *is* Love created us *out* of love to share *Love itself*. Mary's life of obedience is crowned and completed in Love.

Scramble around in your brain, if you would, for the post-it note you left there a few moments ago. The Zen wisdom that ***“A piece of bread is an ambassador of the cosmos”***

Just as the whole of creation may be seen in a tiny part of it, so the entirety of God's relationship with humanity - and the depth of humanity's response to God – is drawn together, embodied, *held* in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She who's life became a mirror of Christ's life, becomes the model for Christ's Church. Obedience that is born of, sustained by and ultimately crowned with Love. As 'a piece of bread is an ambassador of the cosmos', so Mary is for us the ambassador of relationship with God. To celebrate the Assumption is then not just to celebrate the intimacy of *her* relationship with God in Christ, but to celebrate ours as well, as together we '*look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come*'.

In this Eucharist, as you prepare to encounter the risen Christ in a piece of bread, a sip of wine, consider your relationship with God. And remember that primarily it is not about what you do or even how you live but primarily it is about how God loves you. Intimately. Now.

And in the sacramental intimacy of that moment of receiving Communion (and the laying on of hands) remember the invitation, the promise and the potential of your intimacy with Christ.

Because the piece of bread in your hands is not merely an ambassador of the cosmos, but the one through whom the cosmos came to be. The one who sustains and enlivens all that you are and all that you can and will be, with Love. Amen