

Reflection from the 'Little Book of Lent' – an anthology composed by Reverend Canon Arthur Howells (2014, London: Harper Collins) comprising extracts from several of his favourite spiritual writers and reproduced here with his kind permission.

For Reflection

Timothy Radcliffe OP is a Dominican friar. Educated at Oxford and Paris, he taught theology at Oxford and was involved in a ministry to people with AIDS. He is the author of Sing a New Song, I Call You Friends, Why go to Church? and Seven Last Words. The extract which follows is from What is the Point of Being a Christian.

Being Ordinary

The Church should be a community in which one discovers the delight of being ordinary, of belonging to each other. God says to St Catherine of Siena, 'I could well have made human beings in such a way that they each had everything, but I preferred to give different gifts to different people, so that they would all need each other.' Bishops are called our 'ordinaries' not because they are boring but because they are charged with cultivating a community in which we may learn how to belong together. In the eighteenth century the word was also used for people who delivered messages, the early equivalent of postmen, who were vital to the interchanges of the community.

A hundred yards down the street in which I live there is a sign which says, 'The world can be changed by ordinary people like you'. I am embarrassed to admit that I used to feel irritated every time I walked past that sign. How do they know that I am ordinary? For all that they know I might be a remarkable person. It seemed to me patronizing. And yet the Church should be a community which summons one beyond the need to be a celebrity in order to matter and which frees one from the compulsion to claim the centre of the stage. We may learn the joy of ordinariness, not in the sense of being boring or undistinguished, but of being turned to face each other and receive life from each other.

When Thomas Merton left his monastery after some years, to visit the local town for the first time, he was overwhelmed with a sense of the beauty and goodness of the people whom he had met.

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself glorified in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun There are no strangers If only we could see each other as we really are all the time. there would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other the gate of heaven is everywhere.

On the road to Jerusalem, the apostles argue among themselves as to which of them is the greatest. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, ask Jesus, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory' (Mark 10:37). They wish to have the top jobs, to bask in the glory, to be raised up above the competition. They do not wish to be ordinary, 'common or garden' apostles. But Jesus says that 'to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared' (10:40). And indeed when

he is lifted up in glory on the cross, it is two ordinary thieves, whose names we do not even know, who have the places of honour.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF BEING A CHRISTIAN?
TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE OP

Scripture Reading
St Mark 10:35-45

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

Prayer

Lord, we are your pilgrim people;
be with us on our journey.
Teach us to share our gifts
with humility and generosity
that, following you,
we may not fall in love
with the things of time,
but come to love the things that endure