

Happiness

One of the more unusual United Nations international days is arguably the International Day of Happiness which will be celebrated next Tuesday on 20th March. The aim is of course to be happy and to foster and encourage happiness and well-being.

This is perhaps particularly poignant so soon after the death of Sir Ken Dodd at the age of 90. What effectively became the comedian's signature tune was his song "Happiness", with its refrain:

"Happiness, happiness, the greatest gift that I possess. I thank the Lord I've been blessed With more than my share of happiness."

Although he did not write the words himself one can understand why that song meant so much to him. He devoted his life to making people happy and that aim was underpinned by his Christian faith.

To be happy is a good and very natural thing. Happiness, contentment, whatever you call it, enriches human life. Indeed it makes life bearable..

Yet there are also challenges. One's own happiness at the expense of others' unhappiness is purely selfish and clearly not the aim of the United Nations Day, which has as its goal the good of all, mutual happiness, shared happiness.

You may wonder why I chose as our Bible reading just now the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.1-12). For these words too are very challenging and uncomfortable – not at all cosy and sentimental.

We have to remember that the Greek word often translated "blessed" – makarios – also means "happy". Jesus turns our normal expectations on their heads. We would expect: "happy are the rich", not "happy are the poor". We would expect "happy are the confident and assured" not "happy are the meek". Jesus gives a new meaning to happiness. He teaches us that happiness lies in selflessness, in love and service of others; that it leads ultimately to satisfying and meaningful lives, following the example of his own incarnate life.

For us here at St Martin's and for the Community of the Cross of Nails our Lord's key statement is of course "happy are the peacemakers". For peace lies at the heart of God's reconciling work in his Son Jesus Christ. It lies at the heart of the values of the kingdom of God: peace with one another and peace with God. Yes, peace and happiness go together.

And so it is right that we should strive for happiness - true and deep happiness – in our own lives and in our relationships and encounters with others. For our happiness comes ultimately as a gift from God.

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