

Consumerism

York is already very much geared up for Christmas. There are festive lights in many streets and there are Christmas trees in St Helen's Square and Parliament Street. The St Nicholas Fair is in full flow with many tempting things to buy. For retailers Christmas is the most important time of the year. They rely on it for their profits and their continuing sustainability. Low takings at Christmas can be very bad.

Today, as you probably know, is Black Friday when people scramble to get bargains in the stores and shops that participate. The encouragement to buy and spend is even more intense. As a reaction to this it is also Buy Nothing Day. I rather suspect that not many people will be heeding that message, though.

Whether we like it or not consumerism is a powerful feature of modern life in this and many other countries. The term retail therapy sums up the comfort that people find in buying things, in acquiring something new.

The jobs of many people depend on the success of retailers. And so one could argue that through our purchases we support others. That is perhaps particularly so in these times of austerity and uncertainty.

Material possessions are not bad in themselves. Though we should perhaps be more diligent in asking ourselves whether we really need a particular thing or not. The answer may be that we can do without it. On the other hand the answer may be that it is something we need for our work or for our commitments to supporting others.

Our Bible reading was that well-known passage about not being anxious about possessions and the necessities of life (Matthew 6.25-33). And that is an important message for us in our world today with all its problems and pressures.

The important thing about our attitude to material possessions is that they should not dominate our lives. We should not see them as the be all and end all of our daily existence. They should not become our prime preoccupation.

On the contrary we should focus instead on aspects of life that are ultimately more fulfilling: concern for the wellbeing and happiness of others, concern for the wellbeing of the natural world and the resources that need to be shared equitably among all people. As this church of St Martin constantly reminds us, at the forefront of our minds and our prayers should be, not only on this Friday or each Friday, but each day God's call for peace, justice and reconciliation.

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