

## United Nations International Days

I find a good basis for these Friday reflections is often the many international days assigned by the United Nations throughout the year. This week there have indeed been a number of very important issues covered: Monday was Human Rights Day; Tuesday was International Mountain Day, Wednesday was both International Day of Neutrality and International Universal Health Coverage Day, and next Tuesday will be International Migrants Day. It is good that we are reminded of these continuing and very pressing issues in our world today.

We have thought about the importance of safeguarding human rights on a number of occasions during this year in which we celebrate seventy years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a flat city like York it is perhaps easy to forget those who live in mountainous regions and the ecological challenges faced there. The presence of neutral countries, organizations and individuals is an important tool in the quest for peace and reconciliation. The role as mediators of those not aligned to one side or other in a conflict or dispute is immense. The need for universal healthcare is something that goes without saying. Despite its many challenges our own National Health Service is something to be celebrated, cherished and protected. And the issue of migration remains a very hot topic. On the one hand there are the harrowing stories of those who are forced to leave their homes because of war, violence or persecution, and on the other hand there is the real prejudice against migrants in the countries to which they flee.

These are all issues which should concern all of us, and not least those of us who profess and call themselves Christians. We heard just now those well known words of our Lord about care for others in need (Matthew 25.31-40). That passage lies at the heart of the Church's social Gospel. It applies on the individual level. It reminds us how as individuals we should act towards other people. It reminds of the practical concern and help we should give to those we met. And that of course is not always easy.

However, it also applies at the local, national and global levels. For it is often simpler to deal with the symptoms of problems than their causes. And yet as Christians we should be concerned with both. In that we follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry.

This season of Advent with its emphasis on the coming of God's kingdom of love and justice is one both of anticipation and of hope. For we do not face the problems of the world alone, but, we firmly believe, with the help of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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