

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

There is saying that variety is the spice of life and that is surely very true. If we were all the same then life would be very monochrome. Variety adds colour and vibrancy to life. Modern means of travel allow us to experience much more easily other cultures first hand than in the past, and many people do just that. And yet there is plenty of cultural diversity even in our own country.

Cultural diversity finds expression in many different ways: in norms of behaviour, in social relations, in moral understanding, in dress, in music and the arts, to name but a few.

For some people that is a challenge, even a threat. The unfamiliar can appear threatening, unsettling. And yet it is much more helpful to be positive and to welcome, enjoy and celebrate diversity. That does not mean at all, though, that we must accept all the values of other cultures or even abandon our own culture. Far from it.

This last Tuesday, 21nd May, was the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. To quote from the official United Nations website:

“Three-quarters of the world’s major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability and development. Cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only with respect to economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life. ... Cultural diversity is thus an asset that is indispensable for poverty reduction and the achievement of sustainable development. At the same time, acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity – in particular through innovative use of media and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) – are conducive to dialogue among civilizations and cultures, respect and mutual understanding.”

Acceptance of, and interaction with, cultural diversity has economic benefits for all. And yet arguably more important are the human gains in mutual understanding and respect which are key requirements for peace. All that can only lead to a better, more stable and peaceable world.

We have to admit that we still have a long way to go to celebrate diversity in all its forms. The great virtues of tolerance and openness are sadly not always to be found, not least in our own divided country. Yet they are goals to which, with God’s help, we must continue to strive to achieve. For as St Paul reminded us in our Bible reading (1 Corinthians 12.12-26) we are all interdependent and complement one another.

Kingsley Boulton
24th May 2019