

Chaplain's Letter February

Thursday, 11 February 2010

Most of us have been horrified by the pictures we have seen of the terrible earthquake in Haiti. It is inevitable and good that we ask ourselves why such disasters can happen in a world created by a loving God. I believe to ask such a question is a sign of compassion and I also believe God is not offended by it. Some times we need to get angry with God at the injustices in the world as part of our response - we are after all made up of a heart and a head. God has a broad pair of shoulders, though and does not fall out of heaven if we complain about such injustices. There is a Jewish story of a tailor who dies and goes to heaven and stands before God. "What sins have you committed?" asks God and the tailor replies, "Well I have lied a little here, cheated a little there and neglected things I should not have. These are my sins oh God for which I am sorry. But you, God, what are your sins? You have left the poor in hunger and allowed the child to die at its mother's breast and neglected your people in their need. But let us be reasonable, you forgive me my sins and I will forgive you yours and we will sit down together and drink L'Hayyim, to Life." I am sure God smiled at this.

In response to this tragedy as well as the many tragedies and sorrows of our own life, perhaps we too can sit down with God and drink to Life, to affirm despite all we see before us, despite all that is imperfect and unfair in our world, the absolute goodness of life and its unquestionable value. I have read that when God refused to allow Moses to see his face it was not to protect him from its blinding glory but so that Moses would not see the anguish and pain in it. Do we not see this anguish and pain in the cross, on which Jesus shared our pain, disbelief and anger and promised to bring us up the other side to resurrection. And of course does compassion not mean: "Sharing someone's pain"? God's compassion for us consists in sharing our pain and then bringing us out the other side.

So let our prayers and our vision be this: that out of the terrible tragedy of Haiti, and out of our own personal tragedies the sun will rise on a better world for all of us, that fairness and justice will increase not decrease, that through our sharing in the pain of others we will all of us be transformed into the likeness of Christ and his compassion. And may we learn to sit down together and drink L'Hayyim - to Life.

Thank you to all those who donated on Sunday 24th January and subsequently to the bishops' appeal for Haiti. We raised around 400€ which will be sent to the diocese and thence to Christian Aid for the victims of the earthquake.