

Chaplain's March Letter

Thursday, 04 March 2010

It has become a commonplace these days that we will live surrounded by media overload - emails, phones, mobiles, faxes, facebook, texts, 24 hour news media etc...

It is also all happening so quickly we feel often that we are like bunnies in the headlights, so overloaded that we can't move or think in the cacophony of noise. The bishops of the Church of England have this Lent suggested that we undertake a technology fast, rather than give up chocolate or alcohol or something like that. At first I thought this sounded a bit silly, but at a second glance, I think it has some merit. I am a great fan of the new technologies, but like everything else in life, they can be used for good or ill, they can build up or destroy, and as with nearly everything in life, only moderate use will get a balance on things and keep us sane. There is also the danger of addiction to these things - in other words the danger that they own us rather than the other way round, and as addictions go, this one can get very expensive! In the end I think we can only usefully absorb so much information and so many opinions at any one time and I often ask myself just how much of any of this is of lasting value anyway? Again we are perhaps more conscious of just how passing and ephemeral these loud voices are, where today's scandal is forgotten tomorrow when some new crisis is whipped up to keep the media leviathan going.

We are led to believe in this age that loud voices will make the running, but is usually the case that those with the loudest voices are the shrillest but not always the wisest. There is a great spiritual tradition that says that wisdom will be found in silence - there is a Daoist saying that goes, "Those who know, don't talk and those who talk, don't know." In Christian spirituality depth and wisdom have been recognised in silence and contemplation rather than loud gestures and words., Ezekiel famously found God, after much searching, in the stillness, not the clap of thunder or the raging storm and Jesus himself often retreated from the crowds to find the stillness in which he could find that oneness with God.

So maybe this Lent, we could ponder what our bishops are advising us: moderate our use of the internet and other technologies, slow our lives down, cut out so many of the loud shrill voices around us and spend more time in stillness and rest, to regain that spiritual balance in our lives in which we can use the modern technologies to their best without ourselves being owned by them. We above all shouldn't confuse information with wisdom and what is ephemeral with what is eternal, but without some space, distance and stillness we are unlikely to be able to recognise the difference.