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ANGLICAN PARISH
ST. LAURENCE IN LANZAROTE

Reflection by Bishop David Hope | Third Sunday after Trinity – June 28, 2020

It struck me as I was thinking about the Gospel Reading for this morning just how appropriate and relevant it is for us today on our way out of lockdown.

It was the word ‘welcome’ used six times in three verses which I noted in particular.

After all, we have all been affected in various ways by the sudden and unwelcome stripping away as it were of all that we had hitherto taken for granted – even life itself.

What utter sadness and suffering this virus has wrought among us – so many deaths and often in harrowing circumstances without partner, friend or relative even to hold a hand and say good bye – so many still suffering from the aftermath of the disease itself taking yet many months towards a full recovery and all of us locked down – feeling more like locked up, behind bars in our own places, restricted in ways we never ever imagined possible – normal life suddenly at an end.

And now relief – a welcome relief that there is at last light at the end of what has seemed to be a very long dark tunnel. How welcome even the slightest glimmer of light – light which gives us hope that we are beginning to emerge bit by bit into what is described as now the ‘new’ normal. I say bit by bit because there still remains a good deal of caution and it’s going to take us a very long time yet fully to recover – if ever we do – ‘better safe than sorry’ as the saying goes. Now we are taking the tentative steps forward where ‘welcome’ becomes so very relevant – yes, we welcome surely the possibility of greeting our loved ones once again and where it is often said ‘absence makes the heart grow fonder’. Have we been able during the time of absence so to speak to learn just how invaluable and supremely important family, relations and friends are to us – maybe having taken others so much for granted hitherto can we not now welcome this renewal of what it means to be human, what it means to be ‘family’. And yes, we welcome the ability to get out and about once more – a walk in the park – a stroll along the street – a coffee and chat – a meal out and all those other things which make for a cohesive and coherent society.

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One of the most significant and impressive aspects of the past few weeks has been yes certainly what are described as all our front line workers in health and social care and support who have worked tirelessly and valiantly for health and healing – equally we need to remember all those behind the scenes kinds of people without whom the front line would not have been able to function so effectively and efficiently. But perhaps most remarkable of all and the thing which gives us so much hope for the future is the way in which so many have volunteered their services in service of others to ensure social contact, the delivery of food, medication and so on other essentials quite often to complete strangers. How very welcome such initiatives have been and indeed still are. Yes, it's ironic, isn't it, that so often in the midst of tragedy and despair – the downside, if you like, of our lives and living – there is hope and promise about ourselves and our future.

It was the Prophet Zechariah who said *'a day for small things no doubt but who would dare despise it'*. And it was St David the Patron Saint of Wales who, as he was dying, reminded his monks that they make sure that they attend to the 'small things'. Well, hopefully our experiences whatever and however dire they may have been over these last few months can serve to revive in each of us an appreciation once more of the 'small things', not least the welcome we extend to each other day by day in the ordinary, even the mundane – even the exchange of a smile can brighten the mood on a wet Monday morning. And here on this island the way you welcome your visitors can be expressed in so many and varied ways – the fact that you do welcome them so generously is reflected in the way people return year on year. I pray that once again you will all be alive with the presence of those for whom you provide refreshment, respite, reinvigoration and renewal – in short: a very welcome holiday.

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It was St Paul who wrote in his letter to the Romans - '*Welcome one another as God in Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God*'. Hopefully the last few months will give us pause for thought as to what really is vital and essential to us and for us, not least the small things of life, drawing us away from the insatiable desire for more, to a life of greater simplicity and not least the welcome we extend to each other, quite regardless of race, colour, gender or any other thing which may separate us – a welcome which unites and encourages us – a welcome which celebrates difference and diversity – a welcome which lives into being that saying of St Irenaeus in the second century – '*the glory of God is a human person fully alive*'.

May we all pray for this 'fully aliveness' for each other, for our families, our friends, neighbours, for our visitors, for the stranger in our midst, for all whom we meet day by day, for the peoples of the entire world.

In short – welcome one another as God in Christ has welcomed you and to what end to the glory of God.

Amen.