

In a recent article in our ecumenical journal, *One In Christ*, Professor Thomas O'Loughlin makes much of the recognition earlier this year that lay members of the Church are now eligible to become 'instituted' as lector, acolyte and catechist – roles which were informally available before but formally reserved for clerics or those about to be clerics. It's a small move but with radical implications, not least in the opportunity it opens up for shared ecumenical training and also, perhaps, because it shows the Church catching up, at last, with the radical implications of Christ choosing such a person as Matthew to be, not only a disciple, but a friend at table. Who we eat with says a lot about who we are. I've conflated several ideas here but, under the rubric of unity: *There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all* – all things are possible, including, of course, the ordination of women. The implication isn't that Christ descends to raise some up rather than others but that all are eligible to receive the gift of Christ and the gifts which he brings – it's baptism and table fellowship which is the prior and primary call. But the virtuous object: those, that is, who think of themselves as more virtuous than others. And here we can hear Thomas Merton once again, perhaps, wrestling with his own devils:

As soon as you begin to take yourself seriously and imagine that your virtues are important because they are yours, you become the prisoner of your own vanity and even your best works will blind and deceive you. Then, in order to defend yourself, you will begin to see sins and faults everywhere in the actions of (others) (p21 Seeds of Contemplation)

And so on.

And this is the bit missing from today's passage from Ephesians which is all important:

*'He went up to the heights, took captives
he gave gifts to humanity.'*

When it says 'he went up' it must mean that he had gone down to the deepest levels of the earth. The one who went down is none other than the one who went up above all the heavens to fill all things.

On this premise, no one can be excluded from God's loving embrace and God's call to ministry – even, perhaps, the virtuous, whether male and female, willing to forget how virtuous they are.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour