

What does unity consist of? A sense of being present to others without that presence being under threat. A knowing that whatever's said will be heard if not necessarily agreed with. A rejoicing in the shared experience: whatever that might be - a walk, a meal, a film, a time of silence, a funeral. An excitement at meeting such variety and being part of it oneself. A voyage of discovery. What do we so often find instead? Oh, you're here again. What are you after this time? Why are you dressed like that? I'm a Buddhist, or whatever, so leave me alone. I'm comfortable as I am, thank you very much. And what are you doing about climate change then, or the poor or the war in Ukraine? Why are you not like me? The sort of questions that highlight our differences rather than seeing that we really differ only in detail. Dom Aelred Graham puts this succinctly in his book *Zen Catholicism* - the first step to holiness is 'not to seek after opinions'. It was a funeral, or several recently, that brought this home to me. Brother Herbert's, of course, with that marvellous array of people of all faiths and denominations and none, rejoicing and grieving together not only because of their shared experience of Br. Herbert but because of their shared experience of Turvery - this place, this people, this prayer that we all despite all our superficial differences, and perhaps indeed because of them when we see them for what they really are - defensive gestures to keep others at a distance, to protect that citadel that isn't really there. The more recent funeral that brought this home to me was that of Roger Sawtell, already referred to on Friday at our mass to celebrate this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - a funeral held in a vast and freezing Anglican church with a Catholic, a Methodist and a Quaker all invited to read or say a few words rounded off by those of his former Anglican vicar. And what a series of stories we heard, not least of his love for 'ecumenism from below' or better for 'Christianity from below' - the voice and action of each one of us determining the nature of the Church. He was influenced in this by E F Schumacher and his philosophy of 'Small is Beautiful' which inspired him to work at building cooperatives from the ground up, one employee among others rather than as a managing director or CEO - building canoes in Northamptonshire and beginning the Daily Bread cooperative with a few friends in 1980, and still going. And living as a Community of Neighbours - 5 houses made into one in Arlington Road Northampton. These were not easy options; any more than monastic life is with all sorts of human tensions to overcome or at least live with - not least in the world of opinions, the litmus test perhaps of where we are with God. The point being our ability to suspend judgement and enjoy the other human being - and they are always 'other'. So it's an invitation to step into the unknown and to realise that each step is a step into the unknown - it doesn't become any more certain later, though we might fool ourselves for a while that this is so - settle down, build churches, an elaborate liturgy and so on. No, the first step the disciples are making in today's gospel passage will have to be made over and over again - it's one step at a time as they say and best not to measure, not to make comparisons, not to look down. There is beauty enough in each small step.

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