

On several recent visits to Nat West in Bedford recently, after a long absence, I was shocked at the run-down state of the town centre and the obvious poverty of many of the people I saw. One man in particular stands out or, rather, lies down curled up between the two ticket machines on the ground floor of the multi-storey car-park by the bus station, head to the wall and asleep, as far as I could tell, in a space no bigger than a filing cabinet or two. I collect my free parking token and walk past taking the disturbance with me and rationalising the situation as fast as I could. *This is what our present government policies have brought us to, it's probably drugs, it's time to get home* – and so on. I doubt if St. Frances of Rome would have done this; she was noted for both for her strong interior life and her works of mercy, often against the will of her husband and social peers. We walk a delicate balance between these two tensions in our lives – the interior and the exterior: this is as true here in Turvey and everywhere and many people come to me not knowing quite how to strike the balance between them and I'm not sure I know the answer to it except to recognise it's a problem we share.

It's always dangerous to write at one remove and an even greater danger to live at one remove, one remove that is from reality, but a recent film 'Perfect Day' seems to be saying something of what's needed by us all in resolving the delicate tension between who we are and what we do to give meaning to our lives and to the lives of others. It's the story of a Japanese toilet cleaner who has a very ordered routine to get him through each day; a routine which helps him navigate the otherwise overwhelming series of choices which modern society now throws at us; a routine which includes all the basics: *make coffee; shower; clean the loo* but also social contact:

*After work he goes to the small restaurant close to the ticket area of an underground train station and is served by the same exuberant man. At weekends he goes to the same bar and is served by the same flirtatious woman.*

And the reviewer concludes that it's both the routine and the intimacy of these social contacts that make Hirayama so happy and gives the film a transcendent quality. There's a dose of idealisation about all this, especially of the reviewer's comparison of it to the life of a happy monk, but he is on to something which empowers such women as Judith and Anna and St Frances, too, and may, perhaps, give *us* strength to overcome the disparity in our lives between prayer and action.

Br John Mayhead  
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour