

Sunday 24A. 13.9.26

We've been hosting Quakers recently at a short period of meditation on Wednesday afternoons or, better, a short period of silence with no agenda or method involved apart from being together in silence. No mantra needed, no straining even to hear the silence. In a full Quaker meeting the silence is merely a backcloth to

*“ the mutual realisation of a collective stillness”*

– according to one commentator on Quaker practice.

*“When that is felt by everyone in the room truths may be revealed to them “*

with one vital condition

*“As long as there is no self-regard in the person's decision to speak – only then will what they say contribute to the communal stillness.”*

We forego this in our meeting here – a sort of compromise with the practice of meditation, perhaps, but it is the practice of speaking or praying without self-regard that caught my attention and I wondered whether there is something about today's readings, especially the gospel passage, which isn't saying something similar, and also the discovery that slime moulds have cognition, if not consciousness or self-consciousness. Bear with me, everything is linked, even Quakers, Catholics and slime moulds. We have slime moulds here in Turvey, the most common one, perhaps, looking like a blob of glistening froth covering a few square centimetres on the ground. It's a single cell containing many nuclei and somehow works out where to go next, where to find food. In laboratory experiments it's even been able to work its way through a maze based on the Tokyo underground system to find food and to actually do so more efficiently than the original human design. The point being that if there is cognition, or intelligence at this level of the created world, then perhaps all living things can be said to show signs of intelligence – no neurons needed, there's something much more universal going on, and the point of this being a realisation that we have kinship with everything that lives, which as this commentator says, is both a sublime and frightening realisation -frightening because it seems to reduce us to being but one part of a great evolutionary process but also then because we *“might have to start paying attention to the shocking and horrible things we are doing to the rest of the living world.”*

This is where our self consciousness, knowing that we know, may distinguish us from the rest of creation, or at least slime moulds – which have cognition but not, as far as we know, self- consciousness. Knowing that we know gives us a moral or religious responsibility.

What the unforgiving debtor is failing to do is to exercise this unique human capacity in the service of others because he is so full of his own self-regard.

The king, representing God, representing Christ, has forgiven him his failings without any apparent conditions attached, but the forgiven debtor now forgets his even greater debt to God in his behaviour towards a servant of his own. God has shown him what being made in the image of God might be like – a participation in a collective act of love, of being one in Christ – all related by our common indebtedness to the one God and to one another, finding a response to God together. This is self-regard that is sin giving way to a forever regard for others, indeed to the least of them, even the slime mould as a lesson to us from God. To finish with a thought from the Belgian theologian Edward Schillebeeckx

*Showing mercy is, despite everything the deepest purpose that God intends to fulfil in history.*

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour