

## Time on our Hands

Over the weeks we have been looking at our life of prayer, Bible reading, and hospitality. I wonder what difference they have made to our lives? Then I hear the small voice speaking in my ear, "it is a lifetime journey". So, eight weeks into a journey of a lifetime is....? That's for you to meditate on in your time of prayer and reflection.

However, there is also the question about ourselves in community. What difference would it make to our parish if we took seriously the call of St Benedict to "Listen, my child, to the guidance of your Master." A church that takes seriously the study of scripture that asks what it is that God is speaking to us. A church that takes seriously the liturgy, not just on Sunday at the Eucharist but each day in a morning and evening time of prayer, either using the Common Worship or another form of prayer set for the day. They used to be called "A Book of Hours" and many people had them, some wrote their own. If you want to use one there is one called "Thomas Merton's Book of Hours", it explains itself but it is a wonderful way to spend time with God, guided by a Master.

A church that takes seriously the call to hospitality that Jesus talks about in the Gospel. It's not just about tea and cake, it's also about our welcome, our acceptance of those who are not like us, the meeting with everyone as if they were Christ himself coming in through our door.

Now is the time to think and pray through these ideas and more. For the time of these "meanderings" we have been locked out of our church building, we have been separated from our families and friends, we have been forced into our households and, for many, have had to learn to live together or live alone 24/7. We may have watched the worship online or on the TV on Sunday and it may have given us a fresh longing to return together. It may not? What is "church" going to look like when we do, finally, open the west door.

The changes this strange time has brought about in each one of us will be the face of the "church" we create going forward. I wonder what that face will be? St Benedict wrote his rule to help those who followed him to live together as a community, based in scripture, centered on God in worship and prayer, and open to any who come to the door to seek or simply to rest awhile in the peace. If that is the way we want to be it starts with "me". Each individual listening to the voice of God in the silence and opening our hearts through prayer, worship and Bible reading to be people of faith and peace.

At the end of Chapter 72 of the Rule, Benedict writes a sentence to challenge and focus us.

"They should value nothing whatever above Christ himself and may he bring us all together to eternal life."

What is church in the "new normal"? Perhaps we need to go back nearly 1600 years for the inspiration to carry us into the future.