

The Unity and Diversity of Humanity

There was a particularly disturbing item on the television news earlier this week about Polish people in this country who have experienced a noticeable increase in abuse and attacks since the EU referendum, an experience shared also by people who originate from other parts of Europe and beyond. The lady from Leeds who was interviewed had lived in this country for eight years and worked for the NHS. She had not experienced problems to such an extent before. Understandably she now felt fearful and rejected.

It is generally recognized that the number of reported acts of hate crimes, of verbal abuse and physical violence, is an underestimate. In some cases the physical attacks have been quite horrendous. To most of us such behaviour is dreadful and totally unacceptable in a modern civilized country.

Of course the solution is not easy. People's attitudes and prejudices cannot be changed overnight. Often they are based on ignorance and so education is one measure that can be taken. Personal contact between the two parties in a safe environment can help. And yet the perpetrators may not wish to listen and the victims may be too fearful.

We are not all the same. Indeed diversity is one of the riches of humanity, not a problem. We all bring our own gifts, insights and cultures into the mix. We can learn a lot from one another. Our lives can be enriched by meeting and listening to others who have different perceptions to our own. Differences of race, culture and faith are to be celebrated rather than become an arena for conflict.

St Paul had to deal with issues of division in some of the early Christian communities, in particular in Corinth, as reflected in the passage from his first letter to the Christians there that we just heard (1 Corinthians 12.12-20). The Church is a body with many members that have distinctive roles but which are essential to the whole. The Church is a unity but at the same time diverse. Those two characteristics are not in opposition but are instead complementary. That is so because it is the body of Christ - Christ whom Paul elsewhere states is the head of the body.

As we know too well the Church has not always lived up to that model and is still in many ways divided. It is an ideal to which we have to continue to work, though. And this idea of the united and yet diverse body can be applied more widely to the world in which we live. Our common humanity, our basic common values allow and indeed flourish in diversity. May that understanding of God's world become a reality. May people learn to live with difference and to value one another, just as God values all of us.

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