

In recent years we seem to have become either actors or clergy in our family. The stage has claimed two of my aunts, a brother and one of my sons; and my brother-in-law, daughter-in-law and two sons are all clergy as well as myself. Whenever this fact emerges, people inevitably remark that there's a close connection between these two professions, and I dare say they're right. Our youngest son, Nicholas, probably expressed it best when he suggested to a former bishop of Worcester that they were in similar jobs because they were both involved in "dressing up and showing off"!

However that may be, I feel profoundly thankful for the past fifty years as a priest. I have been given the opportunity to serve in many different church communities, and to have known some lovely people along the way. One of the great privileges of being a priest in a parish is that you can see God working in people's lives. So when, we celebrate All Saints Day each year, I give thanks for people I remember, like Ronnie McLaughlan, Nurse Duncan, Harry Hartley, Peter Cobb, Jack Gilbertson, Lena Austen, Eleanor Savery, Tom Mansell, Mrs Mole, Roger Bastable, Mary Allan, Malcolm Harvey, Brenda Kentish, and many, many others. God meets us in our relationships. As Bishop John Taylor put it – he is the "go-between God". And the miracle is the way grace can transform us. I have been very fortunate in being able to witness this transformation taking place in so many lives.

God reveals himself as we live together through our challenges and opportunities. And he reveals himself as Love. Once we know ourselves loved, it is natural to want to respond and our worship is part of that. 50 years ago, when I was first ordained, the Church had been thinking hard for some time about what worship involves. The so-called Liturgical Movement, which had been building up a head of steam in the European Church since around 1910, finally bore fruit in the Church of England in 1967 with the introduction of Series 2, the first of the new Holy Communion Services, to be followed over succeeding decades by Series 3, Rite A, the Alternative Service Book and Common Worship. My years in ministry have covered this entire period of liturgical change, and I have spent more time and energy than I care to remember helping congregations introduce and appreciate these new forms of worship, and also

working with them to arrange the layout of their church buildings to help them discover their identity and worship better.

When we worship we are expressing what we believe about God, about our world, about our society, about ourselves. It's the heart of who we are and what we do as Christians. The titles in the worship section of my bookcase spell out the way in which liturgy gathers up every aspect of our faith – 'Liturgy and Worship', 'Life and Liturgy', 'Liturgy and Doctrine', 'The Bible and Liturgy', 'Liturgy and Society'. Whenever we worship, we are coming together as members of the Body of Christ, gifted and called by God with our different personalities and attitudes. And we come, not simply for ourselves, but on behalf of the world for which Christ died. In other words, we are representatives, and we worship as representatives, bringing symbols of our life and the life of the world, to be hallowed, blessed and transformed. We come in obedience to Jesus' invitation to reflect on God's Word in Scripture, and to take bread and wine, bless, break and share, so that both we and the world may be renewed and our witness re-energized.

So worship should be much more than just a Service we've decided to attend. It is the characteristic expression of our faith, our community's celebration of Jesus' love for us and for his world, and a pledge of our readiness to be transformed by God's grace to be the People that he has called us to become. Every Eucharist is a foretaste of Heaven, of the Kingdom come. We are formed by the way we worship, which is why, of course, we should always be striving to make our worship reflect the very best of our life and the life of our world.

Another theme of the last 50 years has been the way the Holy Spirit has been renewing our understanding of ministry. When I was taken to church as a child, I used sit in the pew while the priest 'did the vicaring' and the rest of us were a passive audience. This reflected the prevailing idea that ministry was primarily the clergy's job. Thankfully, over the years we have come to see things differently. We have come to recognize that God has called each of us be part of a ministering community, offering our different gifts. So it's not a matter of some of us being active and some being passive. It's more about assisting one another to discover our own particular ministering role within our own particular Church community. The new Services are

intended to reflect this sense of corporate identity which we are living out day by day in our lives as members of Christ's Body.

But, of course, it has to be put into practice. And, in my experience, we still have some way to go in developing an 'every member ministry' outlook within our congregations. Perhaps the reduction in the number of clergy over recent years has been God's way of helping us recognize that together we all share a priestly vocation.

When I was ordained we were all in our 20s and 30s, we were all male, and we were all intended for full-time parish ministry. By contrast, when you attend an ordination today you find people of all ages, both men and women, some going into stipendiary ministry, and some into different kinds of non-stipendiary service. All are priests, but the different ways their priesthood can be exercised is an illustration of the way that the Church's ministry, ordained and lay, is much more varied and adaptable than it used to be. It's good to have been able to support these developments, and despite what many of us feel were regrettable delays in the way that, for example, the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate, were introduced, they are, I believe, helping the Church better reflect the loving purposes of God for his world.

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet he gave us a profound picture of the way God ministers to us, and how, by his grace, we are to minister to one another and to our world. It's all about service. Everything flows from this. We serve in the name of a God who loves us so much that he gave his Son to show us what service means. So let's set our face against any suggestion that we are here for ourselves and our own benefit as though we were a kind of religious club. Scripture does not say: "God so loved the Church", but "God so loved the World that he sent his Son." As far as the Church is concerned, her important calling and purpose is to be a sign that God has the world in his hands and is working within it, to be a community that celebrates his Easter victory, and to witness to the ways his Spirit is renewing the face of the earth and co-operate with him in this renewal. We are Christians because we are human and we want to be more human and believe that only the grace of God can make us more human than we already are. This is all Good News. It's the Gospel that the Church has witnessed to from the beginning, the Gospel that I have had the joy and

privilege of serving for the past fifty years, and the Gospel that we celebrate today with gratitude and hope.

Dag Hammaskold was the Secretary General of the United Nations in the early 1960s. After he was tragically killed in an aircraft accident, a diary was found among his papers which was later published under the title "Markings". In it he had this short epigram which sums up my feelings today: "For all that has been, Thanks. For all that shall be, Yes."

One of the most unexpected joys of my ministry is that after retirement I found myself assisting in the congregations of Oddingley and Feckenham. It has been real delight to be with you over these past nine years, and to share something of your life. So as I give thanks for all that the congregations and people of Sunderland, Solihull, Fladbury, Kidderminster, Crawley and Abingdon have been to us both over the years, I want to say a particular thank you to you today.

And finally, I have always believed that ministry is a shared vocation. Although I've been the one who did the 'dressing up and showing off', everyone knows that through the years Jenny has been the rock that has supported and sustained me. So this is her anniversary as much as it is mine. God called her, and called me with her. So my loving thanks to her for her unwavering support and encouragement through all the ups and downs of parish life. And also to our three children, Jonathan, Timothy and Nicholas, who have been, and are, such a blessing to us. It's been a wonderful life that we've shared, full of the happiest of memories. Thank you so much for being a part of it all, and for being with us as we celebrate today.

So: "For all that has been, Thanks. For all that shall be, Yes".