

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.**

On Tuesday 20 people with ties to Christ Church returned from a pilgrimage built around the life of St Francis of Assisi. Along the way we also met Clare of Assisi and Catherine of Siena. All three saints are inspiring figures! What is a pilgrimage you might ask? To quote Dr Clare Amos, Head of the ministry experience scheme and lay ministry in our diocese, “pilgrimage is not so much where you start or end up but the transformative spiritual journey you go on between the two”. I will save the details for next month when Martha Moosbrugger, who attends the Six O’clock Service, and I will share our reflections during a Soundings session. I invite you to join us to hear more.

Reading today’s gospel for myself in preparation for today all I could think about was love because of the verse “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13.34) It may only be one verse but it is a powerful one with lots for us to explore!

Week after week, we hear that God loves us, but do we truly understand and believe it? God gave His only Son to be crucified for our benefit - a moment calling us to deep reflection and gratitude. Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, willingly suffered to bear our sins, granting us the possibility of the gift of a full life in Him today. Even though we stumble, we can always turn to a merciful God who is always here for us. The sacrifice of Jesus is beyond our understanding, yet it is a gift more precious than we can imagine.

God is a God of mercy and forgiveness, if we turn to Him forsaking “our foolish ways” as in the hymn Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, “... forgive our foolish ways; re-

clothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find, in deeper reverence praise.” No matter how far we stray from Him and take wrong turns He will always be loving towards us ready to welcome us back into the fold. We are called to follow in His footsteps, extending that same love to everyone we encounter. Within this church, we each have varied relationships. It’s not realistic to hug everyone or share our deepest secrets, and that’s perfectly fine. Healthy relationships require boundaries, yet we are still called to love one another as God loves us.

My late grandmother was perplexed by people who compete to have the most contacts in their phones. She asked, “Why you would want to bother and continuing “The most and only important thing is that there is one person, just one person in there that you know you can call for any reason at any time”. She always told me that quality was more important than quantity, and she was right. Our phones can fill up with work contacts and people we feel obliged to keep in contact with. I wonder how many of you have a person in your life you can rely on. A true confidant who is always there for you. I hope and pray that you do.

I cherish that kind of relationship. Every morning, I receive a text from my “one person”. Sometimes it’s simply, “Lauren, how are you?” Other times, it can be a random thought about her day or a strong opinion. This may seem odd to some, but I recognise it as her way of expressing love, friendship, and support - an extension of God’s love, embodying the call that we all share in Christ.

What does it mean to love as Christ loved us? Love, in the Christian sense, transcends mere feelings compelling us to action. It urges us to serve, forgive, challenge, correct, and walk alongside one another through joy and sorrow. This love nurtures genuine friendships, deepens community, and reflects the heart of God. As

we contemplate our friendships, let us embody the commandment Jesus gives his disciples. “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

We must recognise that love isn't just an emotion. It is a choice we make daily to prioritise others, listen actively, and be present. In our friendships, how often do we place our own agendas above our friends' needs?

Cultivating deep friendships requires vulnerability. In a world that often demands a flawless facade, Christ invites us to be real and authentic. By sharing our struggles, joys, doubts, failures and hopes, we can connect on deeper levels. It is in these moments of vulnerability that embody the love that Jesus showed us.

Let us recognise the power of encouragement within our friendships. How can we uplift one another in our daily lives? A simple word of affirmation, a note of appreciation, or a gesture of kindness can go a long way in showing love. But in our busy lives simple things done to encourage our friends and one another are often overlooked. Let us be intentional in reminding each other of our worth and potential in Christ, let's seize the opportunities to encourage our friends, helping them to feel valued and cherished.

As we move forward in Christ, let us wholeheartedly commit to being agents of God's love and Christ's friendship in every aspect of our lives as we are guided by God's Holy Spirit and inspired by Christ's example. Let us step out of our comfort zones, reaching out to those who are different from ourselves building bridges of understanding and compassion under God's direction. This challenge is not ours alone; it is one that the Church faces as well. The Church can unwittingly overlook those on the margins as both the lives of Francis of Assisi and Dominic the founder of the Dominican religious order testify.

The love of Christ is not confined to our hearts; it is meant to flow through us to others, transforming lives and communities. May our lives stand as a testament to the power of God's love, drawing others to the heart of God. **Amen**

NOTES

God who is **always there for us ... a true confidant who is always there for you.**

I still read this usage of "there" as a Germanism, and in English normally the opposite of "here". Checking my Oxford-Duden dictionary, I found that one translation of "da" is "here". So "da" would convey the meaning here, but not, as I read it, "there".

Alternatives: present to us, available for us

doing simple things to encourage our friends and one another **are** often overlooked.

Should be "is" to agree with the gerund "doing".

Or: simple things done to encourage our friends and one another are often overlooked.