

Lent 2024

My name is Constant Mews. It is my privilege to chair the pastoral council. I'd like to begin by saying how grateful I am to everyone in the parish who contributes to making the parish what it is. As a council, we'd love to hear more both about the activities that are quietly going on in the parish, but also to hear about your ideas about what we might consider doing, as well as those things that we could do better. The idea behind these post-communion reflections, in Advent, Lent and both mothers and fathers day, is to share your collective wisdom. If there are other events coming up that people would like to mention some forthcoming activity, this is also a moment to share activity with others. I know modesty prevails, but if any of you are interested in sharing something of yourself, please let me know.

I'd like to begin my own reflection by sharing an experience I had last week of going to NZ to attend a conference and meet up with family, and catching many Ubers in the process. I don't use Ubers much at all in experience, but I realised that Uber drivers love to talk, and that they often have interesting stories to share. Something, I didn't fully realise (until a driver explained this to me) is that a driver gives a customer a score out of 5, just as the customer gives the driver a score out of five. My last Uber driver in Wellington explained to me that I had an unusually low score of 4.1 (for reasons that are still unknown to me), and that some drivers might avoid picking me up, especially at night.) He also explained that an Uber driver who gets less than a 4.5 out of 5 evaluation is not able to drive. Learning about this system made me realise something about the importance of establishing a good relationship with the driver, not just living in my own world. Everyone has a story to share. But the story that made the most impact on me was a driver who picked me up at Melbourne airport on my return. He had escaped from the civil war in Somalia by spending tens of years in a refugee camp in Egypt with his sister, but he and his wife had been accepted as a refugee by New Zealand. I learned about the amazing turn of events which made this possible, within a complex world of migration rules that were constantly changing. Just recently, he had succeeded in fulfilling the dream of many Uber drivers in NZ of getting to Australia to make more money. But he was still sending money to his wife, a trained dental technician, working as a cleaner in Hamilton NZ. Quite simply, I was humbled by his dedication and commitment to make a path for himself and his family in a difficult world.

I share this story because it exemplified what I understand by the kingdom of God. When we have it easy, we think we are in a lucky country. Religion can be just like a comfortable set of cushions around the house. Yet if we think of the kingdom as a realm of justice and compassion, in which everyone has dignity and a right to survive. Becoming aware of that realm is often the only way to survive the madness of war and violence in this world of ours. In the time of John the Baptist and Jesus, the only kingdom most people knew was that governed by King Herod and the Roman Emperor. By preaching the kingdom of God, Jesus challenged that system and paid the price. Yet he was urging us to change our ways, as we remember in this period of Lent, to remind us that we need to conform not to the kingdom of this world, but to a kingdom that Jesus explained is actually within each of us. He told stories to explain what that kingdom really means, and how we need to be aware of it. Each of us may have our own way of glimpsing that kingdom. It might be through music (for some perhaps Taylor Swift), getting back to nature, reading a novel or even natural science. But it has to involve much more than a nice experience, we have to think about inner orientation. For me that is what listening to scripture, celebrating the Eucharist is really about. But it has to be about much more than ritual. In my case, it was about engaging in a relationship with people that we might not otherwise talk to, that can help us turn around and become aware of God's kingdom, the true meaning of Repent and believing the good news.