

21<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Joyeuse fête d'Ascension!

Ein frohes Himmelfahrtsfest!

Happy Ascension Day!

"God has gone up with a merry noise! To prepare a place for us with his Father!"

In Germany, this is the day when we celebrate Father's day. Is it the same in Britain?

This made me think about what it is about our fathers that we appreciate. Mine sadly passed away when I was 12 but I have very fond memories of him - mainly to do with singing and discovering nature (still my favourite pastimes).

And many will so tragically have lost fathers during this pandemic. Maybe we could remember our fathers and father figures particularly in our prayers today? Fr Tom could certainly be one of them.

And what about our Father in heaven?

Tuesday, I had the most extra-ordinary encounter in our little church of the Holy Trinity here in Geneva. We have just re-opened the church during day-time. But, of course, where before tourists would come in their dozens to look at our stained glass windows, office workers would sit quietly for a rest during their lunch-break, and homeless people would find refuge (and a sleep) on the pews, hardly anybody comes into the church at the moment. No tourists allowed in Geneva, the office workers are still mostly working from home, and the homeless people have been offered hotel rooms or other shelter for their protection.

So when I came into church on Tuesday to work with my student in the hall, I was surprised to see a homeless man lying on the back pew clearly deeply asleep. The door makes quite a noise and he sat up suddenly. I greeted him with the usual French "Bonjour, ça va?" and he replied "Je tiens bon!" ("I am hanging in there"). As is our custom, I offered him a cup of tea or coffee - and, because I had come in with my lunch, I decided to share my rather big sandwich with him and some chocolate biscuits.

I placed all of that in front of him and was turning to go into the hall when he started to talk.

What wisdom and grace this man had! He was called Eric, he said, and he told me how grateful he was for the open church (not many have re-opened) because "it is good to rest in the presence of the Lord. And there are so many reasons why we are called to love the Lord. Do you know any of them?" I was caught by surprise and just sort of nodded inanelly. And he carried on saying wonderful things about our Father in heaven.

One of them struck me deeply. Eric said: "We are called to love God because he knows each one of us. You know how every human being has got a different fingerprint? So many people and not one of them has got the same fingerprint. (Here he showed me his hands, and asked me to hold up mine). Look! God created each of us - including our unique fingerprints and so he knows each of us individually!" Encouraged by my enthusiastic nodding (still had no words), he carried on : "You know, a bit of humility in our lives is a good thing. Losing all my possessions has given me time to reflect on very important things and on God, our creator."

What a statement. Whereas before I thought, I was the "powerful" one in this situation, "generously" handing out food and drink - he had turned all this up-side-down, teaching me!

And then he started singing the songs he had composed - all of them with a joyful theme of gratefulness for God's creation.

And then, he said: "Well, I am rambling on, better let you go. I shall rest here for a moment."

Dismissed, I went to the hall and caught my breath.

I love our church being open - for such chance encounters!

And then, it came to me. All the time, we were talking (that is, he was talking and I was nodding), the sunlight came streaming through the west-window which pictures the reigning Lord, a Pantocrator - I attach a photo. And we were both dappled in the different colours of the light coming off Christ's robe and off the saints and angels surrounding his throne...

Eric is my father figure for this week, and I shall pray for him. I don't know if he will be back. I don't know what will happen to all those homeless people after lockdown is lifted completely. Is the city of Geneva planning on closing down all their temporary shelters and emergency hotel rooms and are they going to tell people: "off you go, you are out on the streets again" ? An honestly disturbing thought, I find.

So, let's look at our fingerprints today and know: "God knows and loves each one of us!"

And on a (slightly) lighter note... I am finally getting around to learning the "Our Father" in British sign language. Jacqui has signed up to learn with me (I will be in touch with the video later today, Jacqui). If anyone else would like to take part, let me know.

If you have whatsapp and are happy to share your number.... This would make it easier to forward the teaching video that my friend Jan made for me (she is a sign language interpreter).

And finally:



With all blessings on this Ascension Day,

Julia

P.S: If you are curious about Holy Trinity Geneva: <http://holytrinitygeneva.org/>