

A CANDLE IN THE DARK

MUSEUM OF THE RESTAURANT

in a video online, a tour guide shows a family around 'The Museum of the Restaurant' – explaining what a restaurant was and how it worked in the early 21 century.

The guide explains that people from different households might greet one another with a kiss and sit around a table together.

'Barbaric!' - cries out a little boy in a facemask. He has never known a world without the fear of disease. To him, such physical contact is shocking and dangerous.

The video is humorous – but it made me long to go to a restaurant! And even more to have that physical closeness with family and friends which, until recently, was a normal part of life.

EMBRACE

In today's Gospel, '*Simeon took Jesus in his arms*'.

At the heart of this story is an encounter.

Not just an intellectual realisation,

or even a spiritual discovery,

but a physical response to the love of God.

Simeon embraces Jesus because he is the Christ,

the one he has been waiting for,

who fulfils all his hopes.

But if we think of it differently we might tell it this way:

*'Jesus took **Simeon** in his arms'*.

In Christ God has willingly, joyfully, embraces our humanity,

and comes to us in the most intimate way possible.

He puts his arms around us in love,

in anticipation of his arms open wide for us on the Cross.

God and man held in a loving embrace.

God knows our need of intimacy.

he embraces us in love,

so that we might embrace him in faith.

INTIMACY

This year there was a sad milestone of 100'000 deaths from Covid. But another casualty of the pandemic has been intimacy itself.

We have been moved by images of children reaching out to grandparents on the other side of closed windows. By people dying in hospital, visited by staff in PPE and no loved-one to hold their hand.

Yesterday, I wasn't able to be with my mother for 70th birthday – Zoom is better than nothing – but it isn't the same as being there with her and give her a hug and a kiss.

The child in the video didn't know what a restaurant was.

More disturbingly he couldn't imagine physical intimacy with other people.

As far-fetched as it sounds, it's not so far from the truth for those children whose formative years are taking place right now.

We who have lived our lives with normal human interaction will eventually return to what was familiar and it will be OK.

But for those children whose early years are being shaped by this disease, there will be a lot of work to do to do repair the unseen damage of a lack of human contact.

INTERGENERATIONAL

What I also love about this story is that it's an intergenerational story – two elderly people, a young couple and a child.

It says of Anna she was 'of a great age'

It is Anna's age and prayerfulness that gives her the wisdom to recognise Christ for who he is.

I'm reminded of Harold Macmillan who said:

'The aged know what it is to have been young and silly, but none of the young know what it is to be old and wise.'

The pandemic has accentuated, rather than created, intergenerational tensions in our society,

it raises the question of the extent to which the young and healthy are willing to tolerate restrictions for the sake of the old and the vulnerable. To put it another way, it asks us to judge a person's worth and to ask how much we will sacrifice for them.

CARE HOMES

And from the beginning,
at the centre of the Covid crisis,
has been our nursing and care homes,
which despite heroic efforts on the part of management and staff
are underfunded and understaffed,
because no government has been brave enough to change a broken system of
social care.

But we can't blame politicians because governments take their cue from us,
and from a culture that doesn't like to think about getting older,
and identifies youth with value and health with quality of life in simplistic terms.
Nursing homes reflect the priorities of our society,
and the value we place on the most vulnerable.

If our society is judged by the care we have shown to the people who needed it
most, I fear we may find ourselves in need of a lot of forgiveness.

INTRINSIC VALUE

There's story of a little girl, who after visiting an old lady said to her mum:

"If I could be as nice as that lady I wouldn't mind growing older."

Her mother replied: *"If you want to be that kind of old lady, you've got to begin
now".*

The story of Anna in the Temple is an affirmation of the intrinsic value and
worth of older people as having a wisdom and insight that benefits us all.

Of having something that is valuable and, as the little girl describes, something
to be admired and desired.

People whose may be aged and grieving or weak in body,
but are still rich with hope in Christ,
with so much to share.

CANDLE IN THE DARK

My friends,

take away your candle today.

Light it again at home,

Light it for those who are in desperate need of human contact and intimacy to
know that they are loved.

Light it for those who are feel worthless and weak, but are of infinite value to
God.

And light it for yourself too.

At the end of today's Gospel it says:

'The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him'

In these few words, Saint Luke sums up thirty years of Jesus life.

Apart from one short incident when he is twelve-years old,

we know nothing of what it was like for the Saviour to grow up in Galilee.

There's so much we would like to know about this time

which is sometimes called 'The Hidden Life' of our Lord – the rest is silence.

But that itself tells us something.

We have to trust that God has given us all that we need to know,

all that is necessary for salvation.

All that we need to live and grow in God's favour.

As hard as the current time is,

We don't need to know everything,

We don't need to understand everything,

We just need to keep our eyes open to the light of Christ,

who lights the way just enough to help us find a way through the night,

like a candle in the dark.