

Volunteers Sunday

About ten days ago, an email arrived on my computer, and I opened it and read it. "Dear Quentin" it read "1-7 June is National Volunteer Week and I wondered if we could have a special service in the Parish Church to mark the occasion". Well immediately I thought this guy wants a special service in ten days time!!! Harumphh... That's not much notice... harumphhh... hmmm. And yet the more I thought about it, the more I thought that this would be the most marvellous idea. So instead of saying come back next year, here we are just ten days later celebrating VOLUNTEERS. You see every service that we hold in this church is a special service. What is more special and sacred than partaking of the Blessed Sacrament at Holy Communion? And then the sacramental joining of two persons in the bond of marriage? The gathering of a family to say farewell to a loved one at a funeral? All services of the greatest importance and each one prepared with loving care. But today we have something different for you – a Service to Thank the Lord for VOLUNTEERS – the people who make our society tick. Yes I think that we've landed on something here and I pray that everyone who has ever volunteered will be encouraged by today's Service.

We've read in the Scriptures a story about Moses. Now for me Moses was the supreme Pastor – he's a kind of blue print for ministry. If you read through those early chapters of the Bible and particularly the stories of Moses you will see that he experienced great highs and equally great LOWS. One minute he was demanding of the Pharaoh, "Let my people go" and calling down plagues on the land; one minute he was striking the waters of the Red Sea, and watching as the people escaped from their oppressors on dry land – and the next he was thoroughly down and perplexed by the wayward children of Israel in their wilderness wandering. One minute he was up Mount Sinai, face to face with God Almighty and the next he was having to deal with people who just about drove him crackers. And in today's story from Exodus he has a great lesson to teach us here today.

You see, Moses fell into that trap which we all do from time to time - I do anyway and I'm sure we all have our moments. Here was Moses sitting as the judge, and a long line of people wanting to speak to him, wanting advice, seeking the Lord's will – a huge line of people, day after day after day, seeking an audience with Moses. And in our ministry we so often encounter the same. "Oh Vicar I wonder if I could have a moment of your time to discuss this or that matter", and two hours later it's still going on... Well Jethro, Moses' Father in Law came visiting, and he saw all of this. He saw the great line of people all wanting their five minutes, and he saw his Son in Law – and it didn't take a genius to see that he was killing himself. And so with the wisdom of God, he said "Now wait a minute... this is ridiculous. What do you think you're doing?" You see Jethro could see disaster looming. Moses didn't even have time for his own family, his own life – he was one mighty WORKAHOLIC. And that is one of the great sins of our era. Would you be offended if I was to tell you that if you are a workaholic that you're breaking the command of our Sovereign God, because God did not create you to work day and night and night and day – he created you to have a life and life in all its abundance. And when you work yourself into an early grave, you don't give glory to God. He knows that you have to work, but he knows too that the human condition is that we will start getting things out of balance, and that soon enough that day off which you were going to take has become invaded by all kinds of little jobs, the family outing gets postponed and before you know where you are there's no time for a break.

Jethro saw it in his Son in Law and advised him. A bit of fatherly advice never goes amiss. Get yourself some help Moses. And that way you'll be able to get some R & R – other people will have an opportunity to do something and your family might also get to see you....

Now in the world in which we live we can see people, living their lives in the same rat race, never giving themselves a moment, desperately trying to earn more and more – to pay the bills, the mortgage, the gas and the electricity, and to keep up with the Jones's. We know of those whose ambition is to win the lottery so that they can take early retirement, but it's all a deception and an excuse to continue in the same way. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and then loses sight of his soul....

Now I'm not saying that the people who Moses called upon for help were volunteers. The Bible doesn't tell us that, but it does tell us that Moses accepted Jethro's advice and did what he was told. And as a consequence greater work happened. Moses was doing a good work, but greater was to follow.

And in our society many good things happen because of the involvement of people who volunteer. In fact, just pause and think of so many things which we now enjoy, but which wouldn't be possible without the person who gives freely, gladly of their time and talent. This church. You all like it. It's the Parish Church. People come in

each day and some write in the visitors book and tell us what a lovely church we have. Well it's only a building. A church is the people who gather here who are committed – they don't get paid for the work they do, but they are committed to Jesus Christ and want others to know him – and so they come and organise tea parties, and garden fetes and tombola stalls and spinners. But they not only do that, they involve themselves in other ways, NSPCC, Animal Welfare, Cancer Research, the Heart Foundation, the Hospital League of Friends, and the local Doctor's Surgeries, the Hospice, the Talking Newspaper – have I left any out???? And because they are committed to Jesus Christ, and show that commitment in their daily lives in other walks of life, the impossible becomes a glorious possibility, Mountains become miracles and the glory belongs to God. Volunteers.... not paid? Why, because they are worthless??? No.... because they are PRICELESS....

Mother Theresa – one of the great followers of Jesus Christ. There she was in Calcutta working for Jesus among the down and outs of society, the lowest of the low – the untouchables.... and there she was doing this amazing work and achieving success. And as a consequence of her work and those of her sisters, others were drawn into the work, and she would tell them when they came DO BEAUTIFUL THINGS FOR JESUS.... and then she said "One day you'll meet Jesus and he'll say "YOU DID IT FOR ME".....

Thank God for all of you who volunteer your time and talents in the service of the Lord – long may you continue to do beautiful things for Jesus.

Shall we pray

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for all the men and the women and boys and girls who have responded to your call, who have given freely of their time and talents in so many walks of life, that you might be able to have a positive impact on this world and our nation. So it is with peace in our hearts that we come before you today and we say thank you. Thank you, Lord, for surrounding us with your presence, with your love, with your goodness. We love you, Lord. Amen