

Lambeth Palace, as I am sure you know, is the main residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury. It is not only an historic palace but also a suite of offices for the Archbishop's staff - his Chaplain, Director of Mission and Public Affairs and administrative staff - and, at its heart, quite literally, a place of prayer. This was made so clear to me when, with 35 other chairs of the houses of clergy from the Church of England Dioceses, we met at Lambeth Palace in January. For at 12.30pm we descended to the bowels of the building to the lovely crypt chapel for the Eucharist. Jo Bailey Wells, Archbishop Justin's chaplain, presided, and the Archbishop served as deacon. In the congregation were members of the Lambeth Palace staff, and, the day after their commissioning, the Director and Prior of the newly founded Community of St Anselm: Sister Sonia Berenger from the Chemin Neuf community, and the Reverend Anders Litzell, anglican priest from Sweden.

The Community of St Anselm will take shape in the autumn, when young people aged 20 to 35 from around the world, who are willing to commit to a year in community life based at Lambeth Palace, arrive *'to spend a year living, studying and praying at a historic centre of the Anglican Communion'*.

Anyone who knows something about the life of the Archbishops of Canterbury knows that prayer is absolutely central to what they do and who they are. I think particularly of those that I have had the privilege of meeting: Michael Ramsey, Robert Runcie, Rowan Williams, and now Justin Welby. Archbishop Rowan has written much about prayer, and Michael Ramsey too. What is different about this enterprise is that it aims to establish a new praying community which will have a profound effect, not only at the Palace and among those who are already part of its daily life, but also on the church as a whole. As Archbishop Justin says:

*"I expect this venture to have radical impact, not just for the individuals who participate, but for life at Lambeth, across the Church and in the world we seek to serve. This is what we expect in following Jesus. I urge young people to step up: here is an open invitation to be transformed and to transform."*

You may be aware that Archbishop Justin came to faith within the ministry of Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, in what we might describe as the 'Charismatic Evangelical' branch of the Church of England. You may also know that the Archbishop also owes much, in his daily spiritual life, to the Benedictine tradition. The Rule of St Benedict has been the great manual for an ordered life, in all its aspects, within the monastic tradition of Europe and across the world - among religious communities of both men and women.

What I find particularly attractive about the Rule of St Benedict, written in the early years of the 6th Century, is that it is sound, practical advice firmly based on Scripture. What he calls *'tools of the spiritual craft'* are rules about reading, welcoming others, providing food, saying your prayers, obedience and listening to one another, times of silence, working, daily living and travelling.

So, for example, on welcoming guests he says: *'All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, who said: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me". (Matthew 25.35)*. And elsewhere, he recommends the type of person who is appointed to be the porter: *'At the door of the monastery, place a sensible person who knows how to take a message and deliver a reply, and whose wisdom keeps them from roaming about.'*

And, of course, well regulated communities - and this can apply to churches as to other organisations to which we belong - are founded on mutual obedience. Remember that the

root of the word 'obedience' is 'to hear thoroughly'. We may disagree with people but we need to listen very carefully to what they are saying, and we can pay just respect to those who are in authority. So: *'Obedience is a blessing to be shown by all, not only to the prioress and abbot but also to one another, since we know that it is by this way of obedience that we go to God.'*

Perhaps we might say that, prayer, in its essence, is about listening to God. There is, of course, a paradox here, in that God does not have a voice as we do. Or perhaps God speaks through Scripture, creatures and all of creation, as well as things that creatures have made? In which case listening properly to one another is a form of prayer.

Prayer may be a religious activity. Listening, though, is not only religious. Yet, for the good society in which we hope to live and flourish, we do need to listen carefully to one another. It is not easy in a world of soundbites and quick, half digested, reactions to public pronouncements. I remain encouraged, though, by such inspirational campaigns as that of Dr Kate Granger, who, being treated for inoperable cancer, has had thousands sign up to her campaign to get people to introduce themselves to clients and patients with the words: "Hello my name is..." Sometimes simple little things make a huge difference.

So, whether it is listening in prayer or simply listening to one another, good will come. This Lent, this Holy Week, this Easter, listen to God, listen to one another.

Martin Stephenson