

RECTOR'S RAMBLINGS February 2025

Plato's Ideal is a philosophy which holds that everything has a timeless and universal ideal form. Simply put, think of a chair. There are so many different types and forms, but all of them are undeniably chairs. Even when they seem to share almost nothing in common, we still recognize them as what they are. Plato said this was because they must all in some way echo that universal ideal in the core of what they are, no matter how much they might fall short or take a different path. (It is writing like this that will have the Diocese begging me to be the new Youth and Outreach Coordinator in no time!)

We are coming out of the time of year when the local social calendar swells. In the past months I have ricocheted between Carol Services, village and club lunches and functions, concerts, carolling, light displays, and a few pantomimes. These have all been great fun. They have also all been the result of labours of love. I know many people who have enjoyed them, and I know many who have been quite nervous during their planning and execution. I am always grateful to the volunteers and enthusiasts who put on these events in our communities. So often the little jitters that effect those who step up comes from the fear that they are going to fall short, to be unable to live up to the ideal that we all share (or believe we all share). This can be compounded by the fact that excellence is only a touch away. Why trudge out to the Carol Service, or spend a month meeting to rehearse, when the world class musicians of Kings College will come to your living room? Why glue sequins and learn lines, when a "star" studded panto is in Milton Keynes? Everywhere it seems possible to find people and organisations that can put our own efforts in the shade. The problem with an ideal is that our inability to live up to it can be discouraging.

Through Epiphany and into Lent, our readings in the Church remind us of the ministry of Christ on earth, and how he lived a human life entirely according to the teachings of God. How, not only in his teachings, but in his whole life, Jesus shows us the way God asks us to live, in love, charity, truth, and complete faith. Christians have had to come to terms with our inability to unfalteringly replicate this ideal life pretty much since St. Peter first opened his mouth. But this does not depress us. Instead, knowing our own imperfections, it gives us all the more reason to try.

Christ's life - showing the forgiving challenging love of God - is the hand reaching out to raise us up, not the boot stamping us back into place. St. Julian of Norwich, another philosopher, who wrote 'Revelations of Divine Love' in the 1300s (the first published book by a woman in English) argued that sin and our own shortcomings and failures are a part of life. Whilst we do not encourage them, they allow us to see the love of God revealed to us. It is in our need to be forgiven, to be lifted up, that we see the overwhelming love of God, and can mirror this in our own lives as we share it and show it to others. If we did not stumble, we would not know how ready God is to catch us, bare us, embrace us. We share that echo of the Platonic Ideal. Made in the image of God. The Divine breathed into our human clay. We are loved, and our Bible reminds us that there is no place for fear in love.

Let us throw off the fear that we are not good enough and live in the light of God who not only forgives our failings, but shows us how much we can do in our lives. We welcome all talents and expressions at St. Michael's, and our village is full of groups and teams that need people. Don't just reside in our village; live here. You may find a hidden talent. You may enjoy it.

Reverend George