

Reflection for Heritage Week

Reading: 1 Peter 2. 1-7

When our children were young, I remember standing in a sweet shop and one of them, as it happened, pointed to some aniseed balls and said 'What are they'? And I said 'Aniseed balls'. 'What does aniseed taste like?' Well, how do you answer that kind of question? So, I used the time-honoured saying, 'Here, suck one and see!' 'Yuk', was the unsurprising response!

Taste, of course, is one of our five senses. It brings us much pleasure, especially when we eat and drink good things. If you are an avid fan of Mary Berry well, you will know that however magnificent a cake might look like, it's the taste and texture that matters most. Whereas, I still shudder when I come across a bottle of *Benylin* cough mixture – far too many memories of childhood torture having been born with a tendency for bronchitis!

Today's first reading asks us a question. 'Have you tasted that the Lord is good?' And St Peter sets before us the example of a new born infant who longs for her mother's milk, which is essential for health and growth. This milk is pure, natural and full of goodness. So, St Peter says that spiritually we also should be like that so that we grow into salvation.

Spiritual growth or the lack of it is the great failing of our society. We are good at physical growth, in the way in which we ensure that our children are properly fed with a balanced and nutritious diet. We are also quite good at the growth of their minds. We know the importance of stimulation and all that enables early learning. In time we teach them to read, to write, to think for themselves. We are concerned that they go to good schools and achieve their full academic potential.

But spiritual growth is, I think, neglected in our culture for children and adults. For some reason, we don't give much priority to the fact that God has given each of us a *spiritual* nature; the capacity to sense the divine, to learn to worship, to pray, to know the Bible as God's book for our spiritual health, to realise that there are things unseen, but absolutely real. We're embarrassed to talk about God for some reason, and we are self-conscious about matters of religion. Whereas it ought to be the most natural thing in the world, because God has shared part of his own nature with us; we are made in his image and likeness!

It is as if the most wonderful banquet is set before us – but we refuse to taste of it. We are worried that we might say 'yuk'! But have you tasted that the Lord is good? And something I want to say as a Christian is – yes, the Lord is good. So, what do we taste? Well, we taste, we experience, that God is overwhelming love; that God is

beauty, absolute goodness, dazzling light, in such a way that we know that he is at the heart and centre of all things and that we can trust him entirely for this world and the world to come. We taste the gifts he gives to us, things like love, joy and peace; patience, kindness and goodness; compassion, mercy, and truth. In the Church we only celebrate good things – we don't give expression to the things that spoil and desecrate human living – things mentioned at the beginning of the reading – malice, guile, insincerity, envy, slander – we could add hate, violence, lust, filth. We also taste forgiveness – as the baptism service says, we have to fight against sin that spoils our lives and separates us from God and from each other. But when we come to God in sorrow – we taste his forgiveness and we start again. Have you tasted that the Lord is good?

1350 years ago, the foundation stone of this Church was laid and this site was formally consecrated and dedicated to one thing – the worship of our great God, and the foundation stone is a symbol of Jesus. And the first reading develops that truth. Jesus is the precious cornerstone, once rejected by human beings when they nailed him to a cross, but revealed by his resurrection as the key stone – he is the key to all human experience and destiny. But notice, it's a stone that works two ways. Jesus is either the precious stone on which we build our lives well for salvation, or he is the stone that causes us to stumble and fall, because we reject him. St Andrew's is a sermon in stone. It teaches us about God, about Jesus – it demonstrates the beauty and goodness of God; it says to us, that this faith, Christian faith, is the very secret of life

And today we celebrate communion, where bread and wine are transformed and made holy so that we *taste* the very life and love and forgiveness of Jesus. We literally taste that the Lord is good

'Dad, what does an aniseed ball taste like?' 'Here, suck one and see'. Christianity is a very practical faith. It's not an idea or even a philosophy. It's certainly not a club. It's about a living relationship with Jesus Christ the corner-stone, the foundation stone. And that relationship means that we worship with Christ's people, that we pray, that we feed on the Scriptures, receive the sacraments, and seek to become more like him in our daily living. Why? Because we have tasted that the Lord is good.