

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn:

Reading: Isaiah 44.9-20

Prayers:

Probably in all religions there are those who have almost completely renounced the material world. It was certainly a shock on my first visit to India to see, in that often quite puritanical society, the Hindu holy men, the sadhus, walking naked through the streets. Their nakedness is a sign that they have rejected the material world and are committed to a purely spiritual quest.

When the father of the young Francis (as he was to become) brought his son before the courts because he was giving his money to the poor the young Francis stripped off all his clothes and gave them to his father. Then he walked out, no longer having anything that his father could say that he had paid for!

About as far away from this as you could want to go is the sight of weary Boxing Day shopper with bags full of all they could purchase in the sales.

The last ten years have seen the slogans: "retail therapy" and "shop until you drop", with their suggestion that happiness is as near as a new car, new sofa, new dress.

Many people have driven themselves into terrible indebtedness in the hope that material things would bring them happiness. Time and again, though, material things have proved to be a false god, offering only a short term thrill but no lasting satisfaction. Accumulating material things has not proved to be the way to life in all its fullness.

Isaiah can say to us, "I told you so!"

Just as he knew that a piece of carved wood did not have the power to give us life so he would remind us that material things of themselves will not give life.

Yet, Christianity is a very material religion.

We have just been celebrating an event which horrifies our Muslim friends. We have been celebrating our God, immortal, invisible and wise, becoming flesh and blood in Jesus.

We have been listening to John saying:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....

All things came to being through him....

And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

The voice that spoke a universe into being has become part of that universe. God becomes a material being in the child in the stable at Bethlehem.....

Totally shocking and utterly wonderful!

Jesus never says material things are bad. He does say that they must never be given the first place in our lives. First place must go to God and his will but material things have a real and valid place in God's purpose for us and his world.

God knows our need of shelter and clothing, food and drink and they are his gift to us.

They are also the gifts we are to share generously and so

- the hungry are to be fed,
- the homeless are to be given shelter,
- the poor are to be treated with generosity,

He also warned, "The kingdom of God does not consist in the abundance of things a person possesses."

Life that is truly rich is, according to Jesus, to be found through an encounter with the living God and Jesus offers himself as the one through whom that encounter can be made.

The gifts which really make for a full life are to be found:

- in the service of others
- and in giving without counting the cost.

My family went shopping on Saturday in the sales.

That's fine - but Isaiah warns our society that true happiness will not be found in the accumulation of possessions but through our openness to God.