

Dear friends.

The phrase *in God we trust* was going through my mind as I watched the chaos unfold around and in the US state Capitol building on Wednesday. It is of course the motto for the United States. I already knew that it replaced the original *E pluribus unum* - out of many, one - which had been there since 1776. However, I had not realised that it was only in 1956 that the latter was replaced by the former. Intrigued, I looked this up (on Wikipedia) and found this interesting bit of trivia.

*In 1814, Francis Scott Key composed and published a poem entitled "Defence of Fort M'Henry". In the fourth verse, Key's published version of the poem includes the line, "And this be our motto-"In God is our trust!" Key's poem would later be adopted as the national anthem of the United States under the name "The Star-Spangled Banner". In 1956 when 'In God We Trust' was under consideration to be adopted as the national motto of the United States by the US Congress, the words of the fourth verse of "The Star Spangled Banner" were brought up in arguments supporting adoption of the motto.*

That is all very interesting, but it does leave me wondering why President Eisenhower was so keen to replace a phrase which so aptly and succinctly summed up the US - out of many, one - with *In God we trust*. If you know, I would be interested to find out.

Sadly, it seems today's US is more aptly described as *out of one, many*. They are sorely divided. I am sure it will take a long time to see these rifts heal; rifts between black and white, rich and poor, left and right... the list goes on. Of course, America is not alone in this. The world is rife with such divisions; we too have our own rifts and schisms to find healing for.

As I watched the events unfold, I saw a young man who was pushing his way up the steps of the Capitol building, turn back and brandish what I am sure was a bible. *In God we trust* can have many meanings and sadly not always benign. Now, it may be that young man truly believed that somehow his freedoms and his country were being stolen from him. In brandishing that bible was he claiming that God was on his side, ensuring his victory. There have been many wrong paths taken on the assumption that somehow God's blessing is *mine and only mine*, that His way is being trod as I step forth, His will done, His assent given.

And yet that bible also reminded me that whenever we find our selves in places of trouble - and it must have been quite frightening really to be in that crowd - God's promise is that his word will be with us to guide us, we just need to be listening. Perhaps that bible was like a talisman, a symbol of hope or protection even. In fact, as I thought more about it, I started to see that small bible as a reminder that God does not shy away from being in the midst of trouble and chaos. God was there, but not in the way many were assuming or claiming.

The incarnation into the stable, more than that into political turmoil and oppression, religious controversy and factionalism, into a sinful and fallen world, shows us a God who truly wants to be with us in the thick of it. His way, however, is not our way and we have to be so careful that we do not mistake his presence with his affirmation of what we are doing.

This week has seen the feast of the Epiphany, the celebration of Christ being shown to the world. Wise men came and were quiet before the Christ-child – a timely reminder of where true wisdom will lead us.

It may be that the rallying cry on Wednesday was more like “In Trump we trust” but my prayer for that great country and for ours is that we might recapture what it means to cry out amidst our fears and confusions *In God we trust*, that we might take time to be before the Christ in quiet adoration but then allow him true access to be with us in the places of struggle and conflict. Out of the trust that he engenders we may be able act more like him when testing times come.

Coincidentally, I received on Tuesday a ‘letter to clergy’ from Bishop Nick. His theme seems now so appropriate: *mercy*. Here is an extract of what he said.

*A cursory reading of Luke’s Gospel demonstrates how easy it is for people like us to focus on the wrong things and then lose perspective... When an outcast woman is healed of that which casts her out, why can’t the religious people celebrate the mercy of God rather than purity-check the event?*

*So, at this time of renewed lockdown and ongoing challenge (with its inherent weariness), we are invited to focus again on the mercy of God and our mercy towards one another.*

*Mercy is not soft or morally vacuous. Mercy involves looking reality in the eye – with all its pain and injustice and threat – and still offering grace, generosity and mercy to those who need them. Which is you in the first instance.*

Finally, instead of a prayer, an icon to be quiet with and reflect upon. Here the Epiphany is depicted in a mural titled “Adoration of the Magi” found in the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Conception, Missouri, painted by Benedictine monks in the late 1800s

Blessings to you and to our world in these difficult times     Peter

