

27th April 2021

Signals

**"Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing;
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness."**

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Tales of a Wayside Inn

I was in hospital for a relatively routine operation. Down at the Theatre Suite the Anaesthetist did the final checks, including, "Any allergies we should know about?" "Yes," I replied. "Oh," came the response, "we don't seem to have a note of that here. What are they?" "Well, I have several ... 1. People who rustle sweet papers in theatres; 2. check-out staff who don't smile; 3. anyone who doesn't signal properly on a motorway." I never got to numbers 4 or 5. The last words I heard were, "Oh God! We've got a right one here!" I remember nothing more till I woke up back in the ward.

Allergies? No! Just my way of lightening a serious moment. But irritations? Certainly ... And the worst? People who don't signal properly when they're driving. I'm not perfect, but with such busy roads, the speed of motorway driving and the complications of road-networks, signals matter. With so many people around us, it's vital we signal our intentions.

It's not just *us* that matter. We have to be aware of others too. Whether we are "ships that pass in the night" and "speak each other" or not, awareness of those around us, and how what we do affects them as well as us, is really important. We don't live in isolated, individual bubbles. Who we are, what we do, how we say things and the way we look, have an impact on those with whom we are in contact. Giving off the right signals matters. How often have we said or heard, "Oh! But that's not what I meant at all ..."? The signals have got mixed up and those around us have become confused. Whatever you feel inside, if it's not signalled correctly, you can be sure that difficulties will arise.

And rustling sweet papers in theatres? That's a signal too! It tells me that someone in the row behind is more interested in stuffing their face with chocolate and crisps than allowing others to concentrate on the show. "But that's not what I meant at all," they might say. Well, that may be the case, but their signals tell a different story.

A prayer for today

Loving God, help me to look out for your signals, to be more aware of your intentions, and to signal the right things to those around me. Amen