

15<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## Only

**“A stick and a string, with a fly at one end and a fool at the other.”**

*Jonathan Swift, in The Indicator, 1819*

I've been fishing three times in my life. For the first, I sat in a boat on a small loch with an enthusiastic colleague. After four hours, all I got was a sore bottom from the hard seat. For the second, I was by an island "tarn" with a friend who taught me how to "cast". There were several catches on the bracken and ferns behind me, but none, sadly of the fish variety. For the third, I was at the harbour of a fishing village on the Morayshire coast where I met a man ready to go out for a day's cod-fishing, and he invited me to join him. I was as sick as a dog as soon as we left the harbour mouth.

I've been Jonathan Swift's "fool" at the end of "a stick and a string". But I am full of admiration for those who fish and do it well. I love watching boats leave Port Seton harbour for a day's fishing. They go in all weathers, to bring back langoustines, lobsters and whitefish. *These* fishermen are no fools. They know what they're doing. They do it well, and they do it for me.

An end-of-life conversation with a man in my hospice focussed on worth and value. "I've only been a brickie," he said. "Only?" I asked. "Why not take the 'only' out of that sentence and say, 'I've been a brickie'?" Without people like you, we wouldn't be sitting in this hospice. Your wife and family would have no home. You'd have no pub to drink in, no football stadium to go to on a Saturday, no bookies to spend your money in. You're a brickie and you've done it well. *That's* your achievement."

So often people preface a remark with "only". "I'm only a cleaner." "I'm only a labourer." "I'm only an auxiliary nurse." "I'm only an aunt." "I'm only a friend." I would say to them what I said to that man. Drop the "only". Be proud of what you do, who you are and what you offer to others. Look at yourself in the mirror and say, "This is me! This is what I am! I do it well."

So, if someone invites me for a day's fishing, and I remember my sore bottom, my line caught in ferns and my sickness at a harbour mouth, I'll say, "You stick to your fishing, what you're good at. And I'll stick to appreciating what you do, thank you very much. That's what *I'm* good at."

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, I say, "I'm only me." And you say, "You are my precious child."*

*Thank God there's no "only" with you. Amen*