

6th May 2022

Silence

**“He has occasional flashes of silence,
that make his conversation perfectly delightful.”**

Sydney Smith, Lady Holland, ‘Memoir’ (of Macaulay)

Easter and Holy Week are long gone. But I’m still pondering an issue which came up this year which I’d like to share with you.

It’s a long while since I’ve been responsible for delivering services in Holy Week. So for several years now I’ve appreciated the freedom to participate in worship in the run up to Easter. Like “the Curate’s Egg”, the worship I’ve experienced has been good in parts. However, the service which has been consistently important and valuable to me over several years is an hour of silence in our church in the afternoon of Good Friday. With no constraints, music, words, explanations, conclusion, chat or hymns, this hour of silence has spoken to me in different ways at different times, depending on what’s happening to me or how I feel. But I never fail to come away the better for being there. It was this same this year.

Sydney Smith, the 19th century English clergyman and essayist, appreciated the occasional moments of silence in his conversations with Thomas Babington Macaulay. I don’t know whether Macaulay was a loquacious person who never paused for breath, or if he used strategically placed silences to emphasise points he was making. But Smith valued the “occasional flashes of silence” which, for him, improved the conversations.

In my conversations with God, I have been inclined to speak too much, use too many words, and sometimes never to stop for breath. There have been times when I’ve not listened enough, or, even in listening, found it hard to discern or understand God’s response to my prayers. Perhaps that’s why “flashes of silence” have become increasingly important for me, flashes of silence that can make my times with God “perfectly delightful”.

Flashes of silence? Good of themselves, but never enough, surely. Allowing such “flashes” to stretch into a full hour on Good Friday means I listen more and hear more in my conversations with God. “Perfectly delightful”? Yes, it felt that way this year – and I’m sure my God, on the other end of our conversation, appreciated that too.

A prayer for today

No words today, just silence with You Amen