

1st July 2022

Respect

**"If you want to be respected by others,
the great thing is to respect yourself.
Only by that, only by self-respect,
will you compel others to respect you."**

Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Insulted and the Injured

Staying in a hotel for a few nights recently, I was surprised when I returned from breakfast to find a chambermaid cleaning and tidying our room. She had a bit to do before she left, so she got on with her work while we busied ourselves with other things. When she was done and about to go, she came to where I was sitting, and, in an accent which I reckoned originated from the far-East, asked if there was anything else which needed to be done. When I assured her that everything was fine and thanked her for her work, she stood in the doorway and bowed, her hands clasped in front of her, clearly as a mark of respect. If I'd been standing, I think I might have mirrored her action and bowed too – because the respect was mutual.

Respect matters. Respect for a chambermaid doing her job with diligence, and respect for a guest in her hotel. It was a lovely moment. But as I pondered the incident, it was clear that the respect from her was not an obsequious, forelock-tugging exercise. This was confident, self-assured respect from someone who knew how to relate to other people. And I hope I communicated that my respect had been offered on the same basis.

Dostoevsky is right. If respect isn't born out of *self*-respect, it can become false and empty. When Jesus suggested that we should "love our neighbour as ourselves", does that not guide us to an important truth? We need to have self-respect built into our very being, before we can truly offer respect, and feel the mutuality of respect, that is so crucial in our interactions with each other.

Self-respect isn't selfish or self-centred, it is about an inner confidence, a self-knowledge that communicates itself in our dealings with one another. I respect – and love – my neighbour alongside my self-respect. It's a two-way process, isn't it?

A prayer for today

Lord, I bow to you today, as I often do.

Did I notice that you're bowing back?

Respect is mutual, clearly ... Amen