

15<sup>th</sup> October 2022

## Tables

**"Shall the mind be a public arena, where the affairs of the street and the gossip of the tea-table chiefly are discussed? Or shall it be a quarter of heaven itself – an *hypæthral* temple, consecrated to the service of the gods?"**

Henry David Thoreau, *Life Without Principle*

So, let's get this out of the way first ... *hypæthral* means "having no roof", from the Greek words *hypo* meaning under or beneath, and *aithēr* meaning air or heaven. So a *hypæthral* temple would be a sanctuary open to the sky. Every day is a school day, it appears ...

I've recently spent a week with friends. The most important parts of our time together were when we were around a table. Meals, wine, laughter, poignancy, shared secrets, questions, silences, explanations, conversations, were all integral to the deepening of our relationships and the worth of our time together. A table was at the heart of all we did and all we meant to each other. A table was the living symbol of our togetherness. The "mind of the public arena", the "affairs of the street" and, occasionally, the "gossip of the tea-table" were all discussed, debated and analysed round our table. And we were all the better for that.

It occurred to me after one lingering lunch, that what we'd shared round our table was beyond human, *more* than an examination of the public affairs or the gossip of the street. For this table had been, in truth, *hypæthral*. It had no roof, not physically open to the elements, but open to something much bigger and more mysterious, greater by far than the product of human interactions. This was a table "open to the sky", even open to heaven. For there were moments round that table which were sacramental in their meaning, purpose and fulfilment.

Today I invite you to think of occasions when being round a table found you in "a quarter of heaven itself". I don't mean a Communion Table or an Altar, but a table where human fellowship was shared: with friends; on a family occasion; an Agape meal; a planned event; a spontaneous gathering. The list is endless. So, in your mind today, relive the time, the place, the people, the experience, the moment of wonder, when you were taken to a higher level of meaning and joy round a table.

Sacramental? Yes, I believe so. *Hypæthral*, open to heaven itself.

### A prayer for today

*If, in human sharing, I have a glimpse of heaven, I give thanks to my God for that. Amen*