

14th January 2023

Perplexed

**“Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed;
And guard us through all ills in this world and the next!”**
Martin Rinkart, *Grace* (as translated by Catherine Winkworth)

When I was reflecting on gifts on the Christian Church's Day of the Epiphany on 6th January, I went back to the great hymn, "Now thank we all our God", with which I began my thoughts, the second stanza of which is my opening quote today.

The author, Martin Rinkart, was the son of a coppersmith, who became precentor at the church in Martin Luther's hometown of Eisleben in Germany, before returning to his native Saxon village of Eilenburg as pastor in 1617. For the next 30 years, rival armies from across Europe rampaged through his parish, leaving a trail of devastation in their wake. Tragically, in 1637, the village was struck with plague. More than 8,000 inhabitants died, and Rinkart himself officiated at the funerals of over 4,000 of his parishioners, many of whom had to be buried in mass graves. Severe famine followed, and, on top of that, invading Swedish forces demanded monies from an already stricken people.

It was in these grim circumstances that Rinkart wrote his great hymn of thanksgiving and praise. The power of his words has imbedded his hymn into the culture of his country, so much so that it has become a German *Te Deum*, and is often sung at occasions of national thanksgiving.

"Keep us in his grace and guide us when perplexed ..." I am in awe of someone whose faith could cause him to write with such depth and assurance in the face of turmoil, devastation, loss and suffering. So today I give thanks for Rinkart's faith, his words of assurance, and the power of his witness. And today I give thanks for Catherine Winkworth's translation, which has taken this hymn into *our* national consciousness. For today I am reassured that when I have little faith, I am carried by the people who have much; when I cannot find words of thanksgiving, the voices of praise of others will do the job for me; when I am perplexed, I am surrounded by those who know that in their suffering, God is eternally present.

A prayer for today

Perplexed? Often. Thankful? Sometimes. In God's grace? Always. Amen