

10<sup>th</sup> February 2024

## Extraordinary

**"If a man were to go by chance at the same time as Burke under a shed, to shun a shower, he would say, 'this is an extraordinary man.'"**

Samuel Johnson, *James Boswell, 'Life of Samuel Johnson'*

Edmund Burke – to whom Samuel Johnson is referring in the quote above – was an 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher who served as a Whig member of the British Parliament. In his book of 1756, *A Vindication of Natural Society*, Burke writes passionately about the reputation of a society underpinned by virtue and good manners, and of the importance of religious institutions for the moral stability of the state.

I don't know whether it's these attributes or others that made Samuel Johnson refer to him as "extraordinary", sheltering from a shower with him under a shed or anywhere else. But it is clear that he saw in Edmund Burke something that made this man stand out from the crowd.

Notwithstanding how much I would heap praise on the "ordinary" I reflected on yesterday, or pay tribute to these unheralded "holy saints" of whom Rudyard Kipling writes in *A Pilgrim's Way*, it is also important that we recognise, and be influenced by, those people of whom *we* can say, "this is an extraordinary person". I'll have my list of those as you will have yours. So, I invite you to share a little exercise with me today, to help you take a moment to recognise *your* influential people.

Take a blank sheet of paper and draw a large oval or circle on it. Then, put a series of smaller circles round that – like a set of chairs around a table. Write your name in one of those circles. And then take some time to write the names of *your* extraordinary people in the other circles, the people you'd be more than happy to invite to share with you round your table. You may not fill all the chairs. You may have to add some more. But take your time. Think carefully about those names and why you've included them, because each one is clearly important to you.

And then recognise this ... taking your place at that table, you have just spent some time with your Communion of Saints, those people whose ordinary lives are extraordinary for you, and whose influence will never leave you. Amazing! And you don't even need to go under a shed or shelter from a shower to recognise the greatness of people like these.

### A prayer for today

*Thank you for my extraordinary people, and for the influence they still have on me. Amen*