10th August 2024

Plus ça change

"Nihil est toto, quod perstet, in orbe.
Cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago."

"Nothing is permanent in all the world.
All things are fluent; every image forms, wandering through change."
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

I rarely use more than one word as a title for my thoughts, but today is an exception – *and* it's in French! (With a Latin quotation too … Wow!) This has nothing to do with the Olympics being in Paris, but is a thought I had as I was strolling round Port Seton harbour in the sunshine a few days ago.

The full French phrase was first used by Alphonse Karr, the 19th century French journalist, critic and novelist, in *Les Guêpes*.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.
The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Port Seton harbour is a working environment: big boats and small; fishing trawlers and shell-fish craft; leisure yachts and boats under repair. The harbour environs are scattered with creels and nets, ropes and barrels, hoses and fish-boxes. Sitting above it all are a car-repair garage, a builder's store, a café and numerous homes. And there are people around too: dog-walkers and joggers; fishermen and photographers; folk eating their fish-suppers in their cars; others on the benches soaking up the sunshine.

It's always different. The boats tied up are in a different order. There are different cars outside the garage. Visitors have come and gone. The clouds have changed. The light and water are different. Different, always different. And yet … it's always the same.

There's a timeless quality to the place. The view over the Forth hasn't changed. The tide comes and goes as it's always done. The sun sets and rises again, as for countless generations. The rocks on the shoreline haven't moved. No immediate differences can alter the timelessness of such a place. "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

As I walked home, I was left with this thought: amidst all the changes of my life and the ones I'm facing now, if "all things are fluent", as Ovid suggests, what stays the same? What's timeless? What matters above all else? A few more strolls round Port Seton harbour required, I think …

A prayer for today

Lord, help me to find constancy in the face of transient change. Amen

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