

28th August 2024

Feelings

**“Below the surface stream, shallow and light,
Of what we say and feel—below the stream,
As light, of what we think we feel, there flows
With noiseless current, strong, obscure and deep,
The central stream of what we feel indeed.”**

Matthew Arnold, *St Paul and Protestantism* (1870)

The Olympic Games dominated our TV screens earlier this month. Much is made of matters Olympic: from the organisation to accommodation; TV coverage to national records; the medal table to hard-luck stories; close-run things to people in a class of their own. But one thing that hasn't been spoken of much is the interviewing technique of TV and Radio reporters.

You know what I mean: the interview with an ecstatic gold-medallist who's so excited they're almost incoherent; the competitor who's lost out on a place on the podium and is inconsolable; the runner who's been disqualified after two false starts; the boxer who's complaining about the unfairness of the scoring. Sometimes it's enjoyable. Often, it's painful. But it usually begins with a reporter asking, something like: "How do you feel?"

How do you explain how you *feel* when you're disappointed you haven't performed well? How can you express how you *feel* when you're gasping for breath or too exhausted to speak clearly? How can you know how you *feel* when you've had no time to process what's happened? Yet, "How do you feel?" seems to be the stock question. And watching or listening to an attempted response is deemed to be good reporting.

But troubled as I am about this all-too-predictable interviewing technique, is the "How do you feel?" question, and the attempted or expected response, not at the heart of human interaction? Shouldn't we ask, explore and come to terms with "How do you feel?" more than we do in our buttoned-up Western society – and not just at the Olympics?

Matthew Arnold is right. Below the surface – often *just* below the surface – is "the central stream of what we feel indeed." Let's not be too reticent about asking what that stream might contain. Let's ask sensitively, explore lovingly and respond honestly, bringing out of obscurity that "noiseless current" which, for all of us, will always be strong and deep.

A prayer for today

I don't know how I feel yet. So just wait a while with me till my feelings are clearer. Amen