

## Reflections

# Are we attuned to the challenges of modern life?



THE last six months have been hectic for me on both a parish and an academic level. The preparations in the lead up to our parish's centenary celebration took a lot of my time and energy, and it's been a similar case with my academic work. Soon after the centenary celebration, I passed the clinical dissertation for my Doctorate and just last week I successfully passed the clinical viva too.

The viva panel at the university asked a question that I am repeatedly presented with: How do you make sense of the

conflict between psychology and the Roman Catholic faith? Their assumption is that the Roman Catholic faith is thought to hold more conservative teachings than the other Christian denominations and thus be less empathic to modern life. My reply is that, over many years, my academic involvement with various universities in the UK and abroad has strengthened my Roman Catholic faith while deepening my understanding and compassion for the challenges of modern life. There are contextual reasons for some of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that might appear

to be conservative and demand non-questionable adherence. However, as you delve into these, you discover that the Church has more compassion in protecting the values that govern our lives than is assumed at first glance. A deep reading and reciprocal dialogue can help to explore this in depth.

In my time at Okehampton and Chagford, I have received over 20 people into the Roman Catholic Church. Almost all of them said that they felt welcomed and embraced by the faith of the wonderful people in our two churches. I have recently been talking with some Catholics

living in the area who, for various reasons, do not frequent church. One of them said, 'I am not sure if I am a good Catholic as I don't go to church regularly'. I replied that I go to church regularly, but I am not sure how good a Catholic I am. A common theme in our conversations is the collective bias and prejudice they still hold of the Roman Catholic church being disassociated from modern life. After being with me for an hour, I was pleased to note that they were able to challenge and change their assumptions.

If we want to lead a life with inner harmony, it is important that

we challenge our own assumptions, bias and prejudices which may have been formed as a result of our lived experiences. I like to draw inspiration from Vallalar, a Tamil saint who many ordinary English people admired while living in India during the British Raj. He said, 'Prejudice and bias are the removable poison in the well of drinking water' (Saint Vallalar, 1823-1874).

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