

Glory to God in the High st

Someone had thrown a stone and knocked out the 'e' from the stained glass window. It should have said 'Glory to God in the Highest'! But the window now proclaimed an equally true fact – that even in the noise and bustle of the high street we can give glory to God!

Yet there is also something to be said for having quieter times in this stressful and rushed world so that we have a little space to be human. We can mistakenly live our lives so fast that we have no time to meet our real selves, let alone have time for God or for other people.

The global 24/7 culture means that we expect everything to be available whenever it is convenient for 'me'. Why should the shop keeper have time off for lunch when I want to buy something? Why don't they staff the phone when I want to get information? There are still some parts of England where the pace of life is slower but here in Essex and East London rush and panic is so often the norm. Some silly people wear their pressure as a badge of honour and boast that their life is more pressured than other people's. It's the work ethic, which can be good in itself, but it can be taken to an unhealthy and self-righteous extreme.

For many the 24/7 way of life is new, but clergy have lived with it for generations. When we left our last parish my wife Vicki reflected that we had very rarely in parochial ministry managed to get through a whole meal together without interruption from the doorbell or telephone (especially before the advent of the answer machine) A TV personality said recently they thought clergy only work Sundays but my reply has always been that they work six days a week but only get paid for one! Most people don't have any idea how skilled and hard-working their clergy are, often dealing with people's emotions and expectations that should drive anyone crazy, and yet most manage to remain steady and human despite the heavy pressure – so let's learn from them how they do it.

First, they make time for prayer. Prayer reminds us every day that it's not 'our' time but God's time we're living – and that perspective helps put our little rush into its proper place. Even if we're surrounded by household noise and children we can still make sure we take time to be consciously aware that God holds us in the palm of his hand. Even amidst the bustle, that awareness is so precious and calming.

Second, we can learn from those clergy who share the burden. It's not always that a parish will have people in it who can actually take on much 'church' work – some are not that lucky – but to have the friendship and loving support of other Christians just makes it all possible, and fun – even when the vicar is having to walk with someone through some ghastly terror of a situation.

Third, most clergy believe in Sabbath. That each week should have some God-given human balance to it. Having a good day off allows us to work hard the rest of the week and stay happy and fulfilled despite the pressure. The shopping culture is trying to eat the human day off, but don't fall for it if you can help it. Having a 'sabbath moment' each day or week gives us just the right balance of work, rest and prayer, so that amidst the rush we find a stability – even a serenity – with God.

This is the way that many wise clergy manage to be so busy but are still not too rushed to give other people all their attention. Give it a try and then, from that resultant inner quietness, give Glory to God even in the High Street!

Bishop Laurie