

## **This month's letter is from Revd Pauline Ashby**

As I write this, the Paralympics are in full swing, and for me, coming soon after the Olympics, it's the icing on the cake. The athletes are amazing, not because they have overcome disability, but because they do so much more than I, as an able-bodied person, can only dream of. But listening to their post-event interviews I have been struck by their attitude. It seems that, without exception, in all the excitement of their success, what they want to do is thank people. High up on the list tends to be their family and friends, then their teachers and coaches – it's understandable to want to acknowledge our nearest and dearest. But often the athletes don't stop there, they go on to thank people they've never even met - the spectators, and everyone who buys a lottery ticket – recognising the part they have played.

I think we could all learn from this. We're probably quite good at thanking people we know (though there is always the danger of familiarity causing us to take people for granted). But what about those we don't know, but who, nevertheless, contribute to our lives in some way? In his poem 'A last Beatitude' the Priest-Poet Malcolm Guite writes about those whom we, as a church, may take for granted:

And blessed are the ones we overlook;  
The faithful servers on the coffee rota,  
The ones who hold no candle, bell or book  
But keep the books and tally up the quota,  
The gentle souls who come to 'do the flowers',  
The quiet ones who organise the fete,  
Church sitters who give up their weekday hours,  
Doorkeepers who may open heaven's gate.  
God knows the depths that often go unspoken  
Amongst the shy, the quiet, and the kind,  
Or the slow healing of a heart long broken  
Placing each flower so for a year's mind.  
Invisible on earth, without a voice,  
In heaven their angels glory and rejoice.

Hopefully we can make sure that people are not invisible, and that they don't have to wait for heaven to receive a thank you!

I'm a big fan of Malcolm's poetry, and the opening line of this poem came into my mind recently – I was in the changing room at the gym, and a lady was in there doing the cleaning – emptying the bins, mopping the floor and so on. The words of the poem came into my head and so I thanked her for what she was doing. Yes, it was her job, and she was paid, but the fact that she was doing it, and the way she did it, made my experience much better – so a thankyou was appropriate. As I left, I wondered about how we, how I, could make saying thank you part of our daily life. The phrase '5 a day', in terms of our diet, is well known now – how about having it as an aim for our gratitude too, to thank 5 people a day – or even more!

Pauline Ashby