

9th January 2022

Signs

“An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

Catechism, The Book of Common Prayer (1662)

Just before Christmas, a friend sent me a video-clip of a small boy in church signing the Christmas narrative. As each scene unfolded – and before there was a cut-away to animated dolls – the child related the story in sign-language. Even with the captions on the screen, the signing and the mouthing of the words were so clear that the narration was easy to follow – especially with such a well-known story.

We’ve become familiar with signing: from the First Minister’s briefings through the Covid pandemic, to the figure in the corner of our screens in late-night repeats of TV dramas; from signers on the stage at big events to Rose Ayling Ellis on *Strictly*. Thank God for the skills of those who interpret for the deaf community what most of us take for granted.

When the *Catechism* that accompanied the “Book of Common Prayer” of 1662 was published, it contained this Q&A section:

Question: How many Sacraments hath Christ ordained in His Church?

Answer: Only two, as generally necessary to salvation, that is to say Baptism, and the Supper of our Lord.

Question: What meanest thou by this word *Sacrament*?

Answer: I mean an outward and visible sign of and inward and spiritual grace.

The Sacraments, therefore, are our “signers”, interpreting for us what we may not otherwise be able to understand, the mystery of the Grace of God. But I want to be bold today and add one more to those signs.

When I was in college, I was struck by the reference of one of my lecturers, Rev Dr David Lyall, to the “Pastoral Sacrament”. This, he said, is a sign of God’s Grace. When compassion is offered and comfort is given, where care brings healing and empathy dispels isolation – indeed in any form of pastoral care – we are pointed to the mystery of the love of God.

I love that! It means that we can *all* be signers who, in our care for others, can offer “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” Thank God for signers – and that, today, includes you and me.

A prayer for today

It’s a sign! It’s a sign! Yes, especially when you love someone ...

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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