



ELY CATHEDRAL

Weekly Reflection

by Canon Jessica Martin



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'Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.' (Matthew 6.6)

Every day I go into worship God in an empty Cathedral. All the patterning and dignity, all the words and music, the choir and clergy - they are all there - but the nave is empty. There are just one or two people sitting on a platform behind the cameras. And I look at them, in their headphones, gazing into laptops, and think beyond them to the people looking into their laptops, preparing for prayer in sitting rooms and bedrooms and kitchens and spare rooms and studies, settling down, perhaps with a candle lit, or perhaps just in a dressing gown with a cup of tea. Caught in the same act of prayer: invisibly, intangibly, separately together.

So much of what is happening in the world is about what is seen. 'Evidence' (a word which means, 'what is seen') is talked about a lot publicly, whether in relation to coronavirus issues, its spread or containment or the effectiveness of different forms of vaccine, or in relation to the conduct of world leaders in public life, the outcome of the US election, the conduct of the Home Secretary, the rise-and-fall soap opera around advisors to Government.

The people who make it onto the news seem, sometimes, to be realer than the family and friends and neighbours from whom we are parted. When we get most of our contact and information through screens we can't help but be very interested about what those screens display - or hide. Who's visible, who's invisible. What is it that we are not seeing?

And - especially for people in isolation - there is another side to this too. Am I visible? If I am not seeing anyone else, if I go a whole day, or a whole week, without someone phoning, have I disappeared? When I worship alone in my kitchen with the laptop, am I forgotten? Do the things I do, the history I have, the person I am and have been - do they have weight in the world? We hear statistics of the dead every day, each one of them a person with a unique history, ripped out of the web of connection and love which is every person's birthright - are they still remembered in the scramble for normality? If I were unlucky enough to be the next person in those statistics, would I be visible in the way that the powerful are?

It comforts me that God sees in a way that we can't. We can only see what is shown to us - even with our powerful memories and the generous compass of our minds, we are not equal to seeing everybody and everything. And at the moment we are very vulnerable to other people's decision about what - and who - matters, about who is seen.

But God is not confined by human ideas about who is important enough to be seen. Jesus said, 'nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed'. In fact, Jesus went further, and said that those who prayed without being seen were especially blessed. *'Whenever you pray' he said, 'go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'* Sitting in front of the screen and alone in the room, you are illuminated by the great community of prayer, the company of voices which echoes between heaven and earth. And the companion who sits beside you, shining in the light from the window - is the Lord himself.