

Keeping in Touch

St Paul the Apostle was a great letter writer. He wrote to keep in touch with the Christian churches scattered across the Mediterranean world, to exhort and to teach, to correct and encourage. He wrote from places like Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus and Rome, and the correspondence must have taken many weeks to travel to its intended destinations.

For hundreds of years since the 1st century AD people have written letters to each other, letters of news, advice, warning, consolation and love. Many famous collections of letters have been published, but beyond that literary phenomenon there are the millions of ordinary letters which folk have written during the centuries when letter-writing was the only form of regular communication. I have a collection of thousands of letters which my parents wrote to each other over a period of fifteen years, covering the years of their courtship, during war-time, their marriage, and even in the early post-war years. During this time they were living apart, only seeing each other at weekends, if that, and so their letters were a vital source of communication, especially during the dark days of the Second World War.

Comparisons have been made between that time and our present crisis, although we face a more insidious hidden enemy in Covid 19, and the kind of self isolation that our parents and grandparents didn't have to cope with in war-time. So it is even more vital that we use the means of communication we have today, in all their technological richness, to maintain our links with one another and provide comfort, reassurance, and hopefully a touch of humour in a dark time. Thank goodness that we don't have to wait days or weeks to hear from our loved ones, as happened during the war, and thank God for the blessings of technology that allow us to maintain contact even when we are having to keep separate from one another.

Even though Paul, as was the custom of the time, dictated most of his letters to a scribe, he usually added a postscript in his own handwriting, in which he sent a personal greeting to the church community to which he was writing. And he always ends with a kind of benediction, "May the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all". Paul's letters remind us to keep in touch with all those with whom we have links, family, friends and neighbours, and by so doing to spread abroad the love and grace of God.

The Ven David Meara

28th March 2020