

# What a Mess!

A few years ago, some of our Sisters attended a Diocesan Conference. There were speakers, shared prayers, communion and activities – plenty to share with us all when they arrived back home. In actual fact, they were eager to share with us one sentence that had been uttered by one of the speakers, Rev. Judy Hirst. She was speaking about prayer, “My prayer”, she said, “is really one sentence; ‘Here I am what a mess!’ ” Recently, we were given more books for our library and there was one written by Judy Hirst, “Struggling to be Holy”. The title attracted! In the first chapter was this same sentence. She also adds that, when she had said in a talk given to ordinands, amidst all of what she considered wise and erudite comments; it was this sentence that had stuck. Throughout the term students kept commenting on it. Just as it resonated with her students, it resonated with us.

On reading her book we discovered that the comment came originally from Mother Mary Clare of the Sisters of the Love of God. This is a Church of England Community in Oxford. She had been an outstanding Mother Superior in that community, well known as a wise spiritual director. We read somewhere that she could listen to all that was being said, give wise advice and at the same time work on intricate embroidery! She must have been an exceptional individual. She wasn’t urging her Sisters, and at that time they were a large community, to what we would call heroic lengths in prayer. She urged them to pray simply, “Here I am, what a mess!” In a community such as that, and indeed our community the temptation can come to be very spiritual! It doesn’t help that occasionally other people elevate you to a higher plane. We might appear to achieve it but in the process we become full of spiritual pride. What is more likely is that one day we crash spectacularly.

A few years ago, two of us were driving down a narrow country lane on the Isle of Wight. There was room for one car only. To our astonishment and dismay we saw a large tourist coach coming towards us. The thought of reversing for a mile or so did not appeal, besides which the driver knew that she was much better at driving the car forward than she was at reversing. The coach driver steered into the hedge on one side and beckoned us on. We edged forward as branches scraped the side of the car and the bus towered above us. The side of the coach seemed about an inch away. We had brief glimpses of passengers peering down at us. It was a great relief to pull away and to emerge on an open road again. When we returned to our friends later that day, the husband commented that the coach driver must have been blindly following a satnav.

Most of us mistakenly use the Law, that is God’s instructions in the Bible, as a satnav that will lead us to a holy life. We need the Law as it shows us the difference between right and wrong. This is important, especially in this generation when we are encouraged to create our own rules. When we take the next step, thinking, “If I can improve a bit there, advance a bit in my prayer-life or some such thing, then I will be progressing in the growth section of my life as a Christian!” We are setting ourselves up for failure. We are following a satnav not fit for that purpose.

St Paul often uses the word 'credited' in the fourth chapter of Romans. In our community accounts, from time to time, in one column there is a note 'A.C.' This stands for 'automated credit'. It means that a friend has placed into our account a sum of money. We have no control over this. We are simply the recipients of someone's kindness. St Paul says that righteousness is credited to us. This means that there is a credit in favour of us from God. He sees instead of the mess of our lives, his own goodness. It is hard to believe when we know in our heart of hearts what we are like. But this is God's way, his satnav for our direction, his grace. He even gives us the faith to know it. It begins when we say, "Here I am, Lord, what a mess!"



In that moment, we die to self not through our own endeavours but as a pure gift of God and we rise to new life in Christ. We know that we are loved and we know that we are forgiven. It is all gift. It doesn't matter how many

times we come to him in a mess, he performs the same miracle. We are at peace because our conscience no longer condemns us.

Ponder on this! "The grace of God is the only force in the spiritual universe that causes a person to grow against the gravity of their own ego."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil quoted in the magazine Christianity