

The other night I came back in to the house and tuned in to see the final stages of the Champions League match between Barcelona and Bayern Munich. The overall result of 7-0 amounted to a comprehensive demolition of mighty Barcelona. It was a pretty impressive demonstration of the power of team work. Individuals, each of them highly skilled, coming together with a shared purpose.

In a two weeks time, St Mary's is going to be one of the venues for a series of concerts organised by Howth Chamber Music. These concerts will bring together highly gifted musicians working together with a common purpose of excellence. We are indeed privileged to welcome them to St Mary's.

The football team, the orchestra are examples of two very different teams. It is the nature of a team to work together, to anticipate each others movements, to respond to unplanned changes or circumstances or errors on the part of another member. These thoughts came to my mind as I read our Gospel reading in the wider context of John's account of Jesus' teaching at the Last Supper.

In these chapters of John's Gospel, Jesus is talking of a number of things. But a lot of what he is talking about could be summarised under the heading of relationships. There is the relationship between Jesus and the Father. He speaks of it as a mutual indwelling, Jesus abiding in the Father and the Father abiding in him. Building on that, he goes on to talk of the disciples' relationship with him – also on a basis of a mutual indwelling. They are to abide in him as he abides in them. This is no formal tenancy agreement. For he goes on to invite them to abide in his love, so that abiding in his love, we

may love one another. In the way in which John is presenting Jesus' teaching there is a delicate interweaving of love and obedience. Jesus' commands are commands given in love and our response to them is to be one of love, love for him and love for one another.

As I say this I recall words of one of my lecturers in college, Professor Wodehouse, as he was reflecting on the unity of the Church. He made a remark that has stayed with me ever since. It was in the heady days of post Vatican 2 with the setting up of theological commissions between different Churches to discuss of differences and shared concerns. He said, 'The closer we draw to Christ, the closer we will draw to each other.' If you think about it, that is a remark that holds true at all levels of Church life. It is one that has served as a watchword for me down through the years for Parish life. A question I have often asked of myself and of others in the course of my ministry is; 'Do we see ourselves as the Body of Christ or as a group of competing factions?' The way we answer that question has a huge bearing on Parish life. To use the language of 'indwelling' – do we recognise God living and dwelling in one another?

We are all wonderfully made and we are all wonderfully different; different ages, different life experiences, different temperaments, different talents, different worship preferences. But in all our differences, we are all part of this wonderful, varied, interdependent Body of Christ called to a life of mutual honour and service of one another.

I spoke at the outset of teams and I just want to go back to the picture of the orchestra. An orchestra is made up of many different parts. At various points in a performance, different instruments will come to the fore and others will step back. You would never have an orchestra made up entirely of double bases or of piccolos. Rather the composer interweaves the different sounds; each instrument producing its own distinctive sound at the appropriate volume and tempo. It is as if the orchestra were of one mind as the conductor and instrumentalists take the musical score produced by the composer and bring it to life.

We are called to be of one mind. As St Paul urged the Christians in Philippi:

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death--
even death on a cross.

It is out of this sense of unity – unity with Christ and unity with one another – that we come together in worship, not in separate competing factions but as members of one Body. It is out of this unity that we reach out in love and service to one another. In the name of Christ we show to a hurting and divided world the power of love, of service, of reconciliation.