

'All are Welcome!'

He said it again but more insistently, 'All are Welcome!' and I knew that that meant me!

I had abandoned Christianity more than a decade previously as the churches in my area never nourished me, so why go? I had had the invitation from a friend who went to the mass and took him up on the offer, after all, I had a gay son and I was his relative so we fulfilled the criteria on the board of welcome outside. As I sat waiting for the service to start I felt the Holy Spirit move across the room and when welcomed so warmly and insistently so, totally unexpectedly, I went forward to take part in the mass and knew that this was my spiritual home. It was a HUGE surprise. I went home walking on air for three days and have returned regularly for the last 8 years even though it involves a return journey of about 240 miles from Somerset.

I found that I had people and places in common with people there and I enjoyed going out for a meal with a group after mass and I really miss that as it was so good to be with people who could talk about the things that really interested me, things I had rarely talked about since I moved south 40 years previously. I found that those who ran the mass really cared about making it honest and meaningful with good hymns, both words and music, and having celebrants from colleges who actually knew what they were talking about or who had worked with 'those on the edge' was an absolute gift. I have never been to regular services where there was such a deep reverential worship and other newcomers have found this, too. Once we would hold hands for the saying of the Lord's Prayer at the heart of the mass and that was special, it engendered a real sense of community, we were joined together as one, as we should be. Sadly, we don't do it anymore. Then there is the book stall – and I am a sucker for discounted books! I have found a splendid selection there and so many have been of real personal value to me as I sort out my messy and undisciplined inner life.

Twice, we have had members who have been very ill and the community has given them so much support. As I have got to know people, I have discovered that so many of them have had a life of service. It has been good to see more transgendered people coming to mass and beginning to feel safe with their new gender and personal presentation, though I haven't seen them recently! I also enjoyed reading the lessons or prayers – we have a wonderful Bible, written to be read aloud, and translated into the best English we have ever had and it was a privilege to read it. I hope to do so again. I also needed and still do, the words of both the lessons and the mass, to strengthen my now ever growing faith, the faith I had lost.

Since our move to Mayfair, things aren't what they used to be – but it is up to us to make things what we would like them to be. Let's keep up the interest in people, talk to newcomers, especially the shy ones and let's bring back the caring community we once had.