

Connecting faith and daily life

Studying the word of

God

Georgina Byrne *reflects on* Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 and Luke 4:14-21

The Old Testament reading gives us Nehemiah's account of Ezra, who read aloud from the Law of Moses for several hours. The people listened attentively, engaging with those who interpreted the words, to make sure that they understood. There is a sense that this is thrilling, life-changing. At the end of this day of studying the word of God, Ezra and Nehemiah send the people away and encourage them to celebrate. They are to feast, and to make sure that others, who have nothing prepared, can feast too. In other words, a deep encounter with God in the word leads to joyful action – worship, prayer, celebration, community-mindedness and generosity.

As we continue in Epiphany – the manifestation of Christ to the world – it is important to remember our own role in making Christ known to others. If we have been touched by the presence of God in the words we read, then, rather than sitting still, or simply carrying on as before, we too are moved into joyful action.

Jesus himself makes clear, as he reads from the prophecy of Isaiah in the synagogue, that the good news about God is something lived out. If God's promises are still transformative, then God invites us to make them known by our deeds when the scrolls are rolled up, the Bible is closed, and we are back at home. ☺

We meet you, transforming God, in word, fellowship and sacrament. Fill us with such joy in the encounter that our joyfulness spills over into the world you love, that others may come to know you and rejoice with us. Amen.

Ephesus

Part 4 – more hope for harmony and understanding

by Sr Janet Fearn

Sr Janet concludes her tour of Ephesus.

Close to Ephesus, the Castle of Selçuk is only a stone's throw from the remains of the house where St John is thought to have written the Book of Revelation. Deniz Kiliçer, my host, asked the local mayor – also a Muslim – to provide easier access for Christian pilgrims across the slippery, potentially hazardous rocks.

As Mohammed wrote: "All pious believers shall deem it their bounden duty to defend believers and to aid them wheresoever they may be, whether far or near, and

throughout Christendom shall protect the places where they conduct worship..."

Two thousand years ago, cosmopolitan Ephesians couldn't have envisaged today's visitors – people from all nationalities and cultures – visiting their town. Similarly, our ancestors in the faith didn't know that we would still be reading the letters they received from St Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Some might find it hard to envisage such harmony and cooperation between people of different faiths. But Ephesus shows that Christians and Muslims can be united in peace – and offers tangible hope for harmony and understanding. ☺

Walking with Rosie

Time

by Gillian Cooper

It is a rare morning – no rain, no ice, a hint of warmth in the air, and light dawning with a promise of sun. The pheasants have been joined by little birds twittering in the bushes. "Nice day," is the greeting between the dog walkers today, as Rosie and the other dogs wag their tails with extra enthusiasm. This

morning it is possible to believe that the year has turned, and that spring may be on its way.

What a gift to us is the passage of time! The earth turns, and we have no choice but to turn with it. We cannot stay in the cold gloom of winter, or indeed in the bright heat of summer. We cannot stand still. We are made for travelling onwards, ever closer to our final destination in space and time, the God from whom everything comes and to whom everything is journeying. ☺

“The one who... turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name.”

Amos 5:8