

identify some of the darkness into which we need to reflect the light that is Christ?

I suppose the first thing to say about our culture today is that it is defined by consumerism. The motto is 'I shop therefore I am' It's about acquiring things and it's about having the widest possible choice to exercise so we can get what we want. The question is "Do we know what we want?" Half the time whatever the situation there are so many choices and no real criteria on which to base a decision, and that goes whether it's baked beans or shoes or cars or schools or health care or even religions, whatever it is we're after the world is a market place; we're consumers and we have the choice; we can mix and match and make up our own religion if we like, one that is comfortable and doesn't have that unfortunate business of a man dying on a cross to worry about. We can choose whatever kind of so called spirituality makes us feel good and holy. The point is it's all our choice. No-one can tell me what to do or what to choose, I'll make up my own mind on everything.

The trouble is we're not altogether sure who we are or how we fit into things and so it's hard to know why we should make one choice rather than another. There is no overarching story to align ourselves with and by which we can judge everything so we keep changing; everything is short term; if we don't like it we can stop and do something else. We change our relationships and our networks and in some cases who we are to suit.

Well, not all of that applies to everyone of course but I hope there may be enough in that for you to recognise it as a brief description of our contemporary culture; and then finally of course, at the end of it all comes something we have no choice about at all and can't control and that is death; and how does our culture deal with death? "Not very well" is the answer; death seems to be an entirely negative denial of life and a great affront to our sense of individuality and consumer choice rather than a part of life and a part that reveals God to us

Well, if that is a brief description of the darkness of our contemporary culture how then does faith in Jesus Christ enable us to shine a light into it all?

Well, Bishop Michael gave us some pointers to this and to start with he said that very simply it is because Jesus shows us what it is to be God; and he shows us what it is to be human. All that we can know of God is revealed in him and by him and he demonstrates what a human being is. Thirdly I suppose he shows us what a relationship between God and a person looks like.

We are human beings like Jesus, so we can look to him to show us who we are and what we are for. We find therefore that our identity is to be found in our relationship with God. We may be consumers sometimes but that doesn't begin to say what is important about us. What is important about human beings is that we are children of God, made and loved by him. That tells us who we are and how we fit into things.

Secondly it gives us criteria for making decisions. To follow Christ is to have values of justice and love on which to base our decisions, so our purchasing needs to be guided by those values.