

Consistency not a Con!

[Ezekiel 33⁷⁻¹¹; Psalm 119³³⁻⁴⁰]; Romans 13^{8-end}; Matthew 18¹⁵⁻²⁰

*Owe no-one anything, except to love one another.
(Romans 13⁸)*

There was a programme on Radio 4 where they were discussing the experiment when a monkey and her baby were placed in a cage and then the floor was slowly heated to the point where it was not just painful but caused burns. The participants then debated what happened next: some thought that the mother stood on the baby to protect her own feet; others thought that the mother held the baby up and bore the pain herself. The fact is that no such experiment had been conducted - I have searched for it and there is no research papers or journals where this is recorded (it would be unethical to do it).

It is the same instinct that would have a mother hold its child safe from a harmful floor that motivates parents and godparents to bring children to Church for baptism: the desire to know that they are safe from any potential or perceived danger!

Love motivates us! The grander the gesture, the more loving we could seem to be: moving house to be in a school catchment area to give a child the best chance; doing without ourselves so that our child can have what it needs; etc.

But faith and the Church isn't about grand gestures (we leave those to God!) - it is about consistency:

- ✦ When Christians are seen to be living in love with one another, that is inspirational - the Apostle Paul tells us clearly, **owe no one anything, except to love one another**. There are many exclusive loves - the love between parents; the love in families - but the love in Church is an inclusive love that accepts people as they are just as God in Christ loves and accepts us - yet hopes and believes that with forgiveness and acceptance they can be the best that God has made them to be.
- ✦ There needs to be consistency in the moral examples that are set by Christians. There is no point in trying to tell a child that swearing is wrong, when that is what they hear. So, from our readings today, Paul repeats the summary of the law: **you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet**: those are the things

we shouldn't do. **Love your neighbour as yourself**: the thing that we should do! When you live by those principles our children see that they are important to us - they are caught not taught!

- ✦ The same is true of the faith into which Ada is baptised today: that too is caught not taught. The *four-wheel-club* may give us a form of *drive-through* religion, but it isn't the same as a faith that makes a difference to how we live and who we are! You may have seen the report this week that says that the Church of England has halved its membership in 10 years.

“Last year 53% of people described themselves as having "no religion", in a survey of 2,942 adults by the National Centre for Social Research. Among those aged between 18 and 25, the proportion was higher at 71%.”

In the Social Attitudes Survey people are asked about their religion and 10 years ago many people were happy to identify themselves with a Church they didn't attend - so today, with a slightly increased attendance figure from 10 years ago, we have halved our membership. That is because people are more honest. That is good news - no-one needs to pretend; no-one needs to lie. With parents, godparents and the Church positively declaring their belief in God today, we buck that trend - faith still matters, faith is still relevant.

Today Ada is welcomed into the family of faith - that is something that is a joyful experience. Here is a place she will always belong. God adopts her fully into his family and the Church does the same. We may not be able to hold her feet off heated bars, but she will always be held in God's heart and in our prayers.

The best example for Ada and for us all of what a Christian is comes from her parents, godparents and the Christian family as they live consistently as the people God has called them to be.