**18th Sunday C - 2019. Are we really in control of our lives?**

The story is told of a tourist who visited a famous 19th century Polish rabbi. Astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench, the tourist asked, "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" "Where is yours?" Replied the rabbi.

"Mine?" Asked the puzzled tourist.

"But I'm a visitor here. I'm only passing through."

"So am I," said the Rabbi.

Let’s take a step back and reflect on our lives. The realisation soon comes that our lives are being run for us. Yes, our lives are dictated to us by our mobile phones, computers, social media plus our possessions that need to be maintained, repaired and insured. Not that all these possessions are bad in themselves because they can be extremely helpful. A mobile phone, if your car breaks down in the middle of nowhere, can be very useful. Contacting people about some urgent issue by email can reduce anxiety. The internet is full of useful information providing you are not hoodwinked by *‘fake news’*. Insured goods if stolen can be replaced. But somehow, we let them rule our lives.

Why do we let modern technology take over? We cannot be bullied by social media if we don’t ever read what is written. We let ourselves be forced into making decisions without reflection because people want instant answers. There was a time we started the day with prayer and reflection. Now we check our emails and other social apps for messages. A current rage is GDPR so we have to worry about what information we keep where and how. True, it is all for our safety and protection but at the expense of paranoia and stress.

The Rabbi in the story was obviously into living simply. But this is not just a call to stop the destruction of our climate before it destroys us. It also contributes to our own benefit. Living more simply leaves us with less to worry about, less to manage and therefore repair, and frees us in a way that helps us see what is of real importance in our lives - like family, friendship, virtues of kindness, compassion and courage, gentleness and generosity, mercy and magnanimity – qualities, values and relationships that endure. But most of all we begin not only to see but experience God’s presence. We see Jesus present in the care and charity we find in others as well as in ourselves. We discover that hope is very much alive in our world despite the media’s attempt to destroy it with its insistent focus on evil, terror and hatred. Living more simply enables us to discover - or possibly re-discover - the true riches of life and why Jesus was willing to die so that we could discover and share them.

Living more simply is not dependent on what possessions we have, the technology or social media we use. The challenge is whether these possessions, this technology, helps us live more simply or do we let them rule and dictate the way we live. Jesus died so that we may have life, not the latest car, bigger house, latest mobile and newest technology. He wanted us to have life and have life to the full!

Pope Francis said: *I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else - God is in this person's life. You can - you must - try to seek God in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.* **He** goes on to say that there are 3 ways we can be poor in spirit i.e. live more simply

*“Let us learn to be detached from possessiveness and from the idolatry of money and lavish spending by putting Jesus first.”*

*“We have to learn to be on the side of the poor by going out to meet them, looking into their eyes and listening to them.”*

*“We have to learn from the wisdom of the poor who show us that people’s value is not measured by their possessions or how much money they have in the bank. The most beautiful and spontaneous expressions of joy which I have seen during my life were by poor people who had little to hold on to.”* **Living more simply will help us discover this too.**