

Exploring faith

A FEW days ago in our church I met a man who plays the lead in a US sitcom. Another visitor recognised him and said 'It's ..., isn't it?' And he had to admit he was often on the TV screen. He had his little daughter with him, who was named Faith.

Just a few weeks previously, a bride's mother spoke to me before her daughter's wedding and said: "Lynne was a Christian before I was. I came later on to faith. I am a recovering alcoholic. I followed the Alcoholics Anonymous programme, and had faith in God to see me through."

Faith is a very strange word in English these days, with layers of different meanings. At the church school where I am a governor we appointed a person who used to work in a "faith school", a comprehensive school with public funding that has a Christian foundation. But personal faith is not an issue in these schools, at least not as far as funding or the media is concerned. Faith is about core values and a strong foundation that may or may not influence people towards faith.

In the UK, a faith school might not

be Christian; it might be Muslim or Jewish in its foundation, Hindu or Sikh. So faith is a hard word to focus on. It slips around. Faith in what, faith in whom?

Many Christian believers celebrate around All Saints Day. Perhaps, as in the Philippines, they meet as families around the graves of their departed. They might build a shelter and bring card games, dance and eat, sing and remember together. Theirs is a faith that death is not morbid nor the future bleak. They celebrate their loved ones in being together, and looking to the future with faith.

I was in a meeting recently where we were talking about faith, and one bright, intelligent woman said: "I find it hard to talk about my faith. I know what I believe but I cannot express it." A writer in the New Testament wrote: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11) A while after the meeting, I heard that the bright, intelligent woman had begun to talk more about her faith and was thinking about taking on an important role in her church.

And the bride's mother – nervously waiting for her daughter to arrive – added: "It was much later that – with Lynne's help – I connected with the Church and found other people of faith."

So faith is to be lived out, shared, and not hidden in a corner. Jesus said: "You don't light a lamp and put it under a bowl." (St Matthew 5) So if you have faith you need to keep it out in the open. Not in everyone's face, but not hidden away.

Perhaps that's the simple truth about being a seafarer and being a person of faith. The two can go together easily as long as one does not deny the other. So a seafarer with faith looks to the wider, deeper aspirations of life. Faith in God will help seafarers see a greater purpose in their lives and will give them a desire not only to help their families but also to be faithful to God.

And it is the saints of God who are our inspiration, who help us see and use our gifts well, who show us how to care for others and help us trust God in the most difficult of circumstances. They believed, they trusted – and so we too can have faith, a faith that works.