

Breaking free from confinement

RECENTLY I was privileged to visit Jerusalem and other sites of religious significance in Israel. To realise that these places have spiritual significance to Muslims, Jews and Christians is a salutary reminder that these three faiths have a convergence in history that has been both beneficial and a cause for conflict.

Conflict seems to dominate the present and this is significantly accentuated by the overbearing and dominating presence of the wall being built around the Palestinian territory. I reflected that there is nowhere for the Palestinians to go to get away from their confinement. However, the human spirit cannot be confined.

For seafarers the confinement is artificial. On board a ship with no means of retreat it may be that only God offers comfort, sustains and helps one to overcome isolation, loneliness, tedium and the disconnect with 'the outside world'.

The 'inside world' needs refreshment and how and where we find this depends upon how we understand our relationship with God. Are we in touch with what we understand to be our response to God's offer of understanding and help?

We all need to let God into our lives to give us the blessings of His love. The power of love is so underestimated, yet it is this that provides peace and contentment in the face of adversity.

When the circumstances of our life are challenging, to say the least, we may think that we are isolated on a ship, behind a wall or whatever it is that 'cuts us off from help', but if we reach out and respond to God's call we can break through the chains that hold us down. God does not impose anything on us but offers us the choice not to be intimidated by circumstances, and to be set free from all that confines us.

I was very fortunate to visit Jerusalem, Qumran, and the Sea of Galilee and in comparison to those who are physically confined I have great freedom. At another level, confinement in whatever form is only an illusion if we understand the freedom that God offers. Freedom from all things that degrade humanity, freedom from those who seek to impose their will on others, freedom from anything that restricts human endeavour.

More than anything else we need freedom from those things that drive us to regard those that are different from us in any way, as being of less value than ourselves, alien in comparison to ourselves, as though we alone, and no one else, are made in God's image. We are all of value to God, we are all His children. Our responsibility is to recognise this – and that it means no one, however different from us they may seem, is excluded from His love.