

## Monthly reflection, October 2013

### Offering a true welcome

*'Therefore, whoever takes a humble place – becoming like this child – is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'* Matthew 18:4-5

I have spent the last year learning the art of a barista, serving coffee, tea and cakes at a café called Host. Host is a mission enterprise of the Moot community and the café is unusually situated within the main space of an impressive 17<sup>th</sup> Century gothic church in the heart of the City of London. As a new monastic community Moot has a commitment to hospitality, to welcoming 'the other', whoever and wherever they may be in relation to us. We have several hundred people a day coming into the church since we opened the café so this is now a commitment we are engaging with in a very concrete way. Alongside the steep learning curve of running a high quality café there has been a deeper, quieter learning that I am only just beginning to grasp: what it means to extend a true welcome.

Jesus challenged his disciples to welcome children, those without status in his society, in response to the question: 'Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Jesus questions the paradigm behind the question, requiring us to completely deconstruct our way of positioning ourselves in this world in relation to others. Instead of focusing on how to become great we have to become like the least, the smallest, those who by necessity are closest to the earth.

What I am just beginning to grasp through the ministry of Host is that to truly welcome another, be they great or small, you have to have first addressed your own need for status and greatness. As long as you still need to be great in this world you cannot genuinely value and make space for another, particularly the little ones, of low status, who cannot aid your climb to the top.

To 'take a humble place' means you are no longer defined by your place on the ladder and you can enjoy the freedom of being able to honestly acknowledge your weaknesses and strengths, without pretension or delusions of grandeur. The humble place, close to the ground, is the place of real self-knowledge, security, and acceptance; ultimately it is the place where love dwells.

It's a place where The Children's Society's work has to come from, recognising the true value of each child and realising that adults don't always have all the answers. It is only from this place that you can offer a genuine welcome to another, that you can recognize the worth, dignity and 'otherness' of the other as a human being, without judgment, preconceptions or ranking. It is only from this 'humble place', where your status as an adult no longer has a grip, that you can welcome the child.

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