Perth Festival of the Arts Evensong

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I joined the Cathedral Choir at the age of 7. And for the most part it is been a pretty smooth progression to where I find myself today. And that is not as absurd as it sounds. For I am convinced that singing for children is one of the best ways of engendering faith - that singing opens up pathways between voice and mind and heart which stir the faith of the child. Or to put it more simply - open your lips to sing the praises of God and things change inside you at the deepest level.

We are coming to recognise that in all sorts of ways and all kinds of circumstances. If you Google 'singing and well-being' you will find a mass of scientific and other research which tells you about the health benefits - psychological and emotional - of choral singing. It's for all of us - it engenders well-being. People sing with dementia patients and it helps. There's Gareth Malone and the Military Wives and his choir at the Invictus Games. There's my desire to sing Madrigals and barbershop quartets. And of course there is Sjngalongasoundofmusic - nuns costume optional. In the end it's about all of us - who in the rush of modern life and some of the dehumanising effects of how we live - find it difficult or don't get time and space or have nobody to listen to us - to express our deepest feelings. And one of the ways in is to come into a beautiful building like this one and sing our hearts out with others. And sometimes, unexpected and unlooked for, we find the tear in the corner of the eye and the lump in the throat which tells us that there is more going on.

The motto of the RSCM is 'I will sing with the spirit and with the understanding also'. And I suppose the other question of today - in this season of Pentecost when the church celebrates the coming of God's Holy Spirit as the animator of the deepest places of heart and mind - is whether our singing also holds the key to faith as I believe implicitly does for children. I think it does in all sorts of ways - for example most of the theology we shall ever know is carried in the hymns - poetry which we know by heart even if we can't remember how we learned it. For if singing is one of the ways to well-being than it must also be one of the ways to the deepest well-being of all which is the blessing of peace with God - at one with ourselves and at one with God.

You will notice here that I am not talking of faith as the end of point of an intellectual pursuit. Faith must be reasonable - it cannot simply be irrational - but I don't think it is implanted primarily by intellectual pursuit. The psalm says 'O taste and see how gracious the Lord is' - and reminds us that the experience of God is holistic. It's body, mind and spirit. It's in the music - in the bread and wine of the Eucharist shared with others - in the lighting of a candle and a silent prayer too deep for words remembering those we have loved and lost - in the occasional whiff of incense - in the soaring arches. The question really is what starts the faith pilgrimage - what sets in motion that mysterious and inexplicable journey of exploration in which we search for God and in that searching find that he has been searching for us.

I hope you have in the fullest sense enjoyed today - meaning that it has brought you joy. And may God bless you as you carry out from here a renewed sense of the depth and the richness of life and of God Into whose majesty and wonder we have access through the beauty of music