

*I* was really quite taken by the opening words of this morning's collect; "O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways..." I was struck by a sense of God's kindness towards us – or should we say, God's loving-kindness, an expression I've always loved. All this is reinforced in the reassurance of Psalm 33, reassurance of God's vigilant love that will never abandon or betray us. And to think, this is the core reality of all Creation, this overflowing kindness of God is what makes things tick.

Part of the reason for my reaction no doubt was that I had spend a lot of the afternoon in 'procrastinative mode' scrolling through Twitter and other sites and getting more and more depressed by the meanness we humans seem so ready to revel in, the evil delight in 'owning' or 'destroying' or shaming others online. Mind you, I don't think this started with the Internet – gossip has always been with us and has always tended to be mean – but the Internet certainly has amplified it and enabled it to become 'viral' – a very appropriate image in fact, meanness as a virus and quite a dangerous one. Because that meanness does indeed infect us. What is perhaps most distressing is how we ourselves are drawn into the vitriol, how we're tempted to replicate the meanness and spread it, to show that we can be as snarky as the best of them ... it's toxic.

And I think this begins to spill over into our daily lives, our social dealings. Before the Internet, people tended to be polite to each other in person and in social setting. Online nastiness undermines all that; when someone has just dissed you on Twitter, it's hard to be polite to them next time you meet them!

Pope Francis spoke about this in his Ash Wednesday address: "We live" he said, "in an environment polluted by too much verbal violence, by many offensive and harmful words, which the internet amplifies," He went on to say, "Lent is the right time to make room for the Word of God. It is the time to turn off the television and open the Bible. It is the time to disconnect from your cell phone and connect to the Gospel..."

To which I say, Amen.