

Fathers

There is something very moving about seeing a father carrying his first-born child with tenderness and pride bursting all over his face.



We watched on Sunday as an Iranian man carried his baby girl up for communion – he could not have looked more happy. We first met him shortly after his arrival about 5 years ago. He was so desperately sad for all he had left behind, especially his young wife, whose photograph he carried next to his heart. Two years ago, she received permission to join him and his delight was incomparable. Now they have their baby girl, and hearts filled with thankfulness.

The walk to the altar for communion had another special meaning for him. It was the final service of Fr. Chris who, after 8 years, was moving to another parish. It was Fr. Chris who first welcomed him, who assured him of his worth and of a safe place to build a hopeful life, who alongside others had taught him about Christ, who baptised him and nurtured him through confirmation. Now he came both humbly and proudly to receive communion with his child in his arms for a blessing. How else could he say ‘thankyou’ for the life that this priest had helped him find?

The world is full of people who face painful experiences, loss of home and family, dangerous journeys to find safety. How might George and Mary Sumner have greeted a stranger at Alresford Rectory? I guess with open arms of Christly love, just as Mary’s father welcomed people of every social class into her childhood home at Hope End. What a wonderful name for a home – Hope End – the fulfilment of hope.

Mary certainly put her childhood experience to good use as a rector’s wife – with George at her side to encourage her. He too must have held their first-born with bursting tenderness and pride. He would know the fatherly emotion that God showed when Jesus took the little ones in his arms and blessed them with such a loving look; a look which sees hope for the future.

*All my hope on God is founded: Me through change and chance he guideth.
God unknown, he alone, calls my heart to be his own.*