I’ve never felt more conscious of being English than during my two years studying Canon Law in Rome.

Living in another country and sharing my daily living with a community of different nationalities made me very aware of the things I love and appreciate most about my own culture and home.

There was another upside to this experience. Living in another country; and in a truly world city populated by people from every continent and possibly nation opened my eyes to all we share as members of our wider human family.

It was an enriching experience but not always an easy one. There were times when I felt anxious with the pangs of homesickness and I dealt with these in various ways. I listened on my short wave radio to the BBC World Service. I made frequent visits to the library provided by the British Council. I even attended services at the Anglican Church presided over by a vicar with the most idiosyncratic English name I have ever encountered: the Reverend Bevan Wardrobe.

One incident that sticks in my memory involves a block of Stilton Cheese brought to me by a visiting friend to assuage one episode of homesickness.

I was delighted with this thoughtful gift and put the precious cheese in the fridge with the intention of savouring the occasional bite.

But that wasn’t to be because the very next day we were served up with the best *Quattro Fromaggi* Pasta dish I have ever tasted.

Without really compromising their distinctiveness two cultures had combined to make something new to savour.

In our present age we are regularly reminded that we live in the global village of a world made smaller by international flights, communications technology and the internet. This is simultaneously a cause of anxiety and excitement. We need to draw on all that is good, and beautiful and true in every culture if we are to create a peaceful future for all.

The incident described in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles provides some encouragement.

It begins with an argument, a clash of cultures and ideologies. People are anxious to remain faithful to God’s plan, but they have different perspectives.

So they decide to talk through their differences, consult a wider circle of wisdom and open their minds to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The outcome of this approach is to set aside an approach in which one culture would be imposed on another. Instead they decided on a shared path forward which drew on a common desire to follow Christ.

They put into practice the counsel of Jesus who said ‘do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid’; setting anxiety aside and discovering a deeper unity of purpose.

To this day I remain grateful for my experience in Rome for opening my eyes to a wider world populated by a rich variety of cultures and customs.

I am grateful too for the awareness that we inhabit what Pope Francis calls ‘our common home’. And that we share privilege and responsibility for protecting this beautiful yet fragile planet.

None of which is to discount the very real anxieties that surface for us all in trying to understand how to respond to many of the real issues of today’s world.

Yet our faith encourages us to trust in the words of Christ; to make his word our home, a point of reference and reassurance in the midst of uncertainty.

No one person will ever resolve the problems of the world. There are times when we have to live with our anxieties without dispensing with hope.

To quote one of the great thinkers of the C20th Teilhard de Chardin: “Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming in you will be. Give the Lord the benefit of believing that His Hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”

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