

Each of us here tonight have around 100 billion brain cells. Experts have calculated that the average person thinks around 50,000 times in a day.

It might be an interesting thing to consider what you think about the most. It might be about your family or friends. It might be about your health or finances. If you read a lot of fiction you might focus on different places or different eras in time, depending on who your favourite author or character is. You might focus on sport or learning a musical instrument, doing a crossword or sudoku.

Generally, our thoughts are secret – apart from ourselves only God knows all our thoughts unless we tell someone about them. You are right if you suggest that at the moment, I'm thinking about what I'm going to be saying for the next nine minutes or so. Most of you are probably thinking about what I'm saying but you might also be juggling other thoughts at this present moment. Maybe you might be part thinking about a friend, what you need to do tomorrow, a medical test you're not looking forward to or what you're going to have for tea when you get home.

The two Readings we had this evening were both written by Paul to two groups of people in the cities of Philippi which is in eastern Greece and Rome. He wanted the best for them. He reminded them, and reminds us too, that what we think about is important.

Jesus did many startling things when He was alive on earth 2,000 years ago. Once when he was talking to a large group of people on a mountainside, He said some things that would have made his listeners sit up and listen a lot.

We read about it in Matthew chapter 5:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

A few minutes later, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Jesus is saying that if we’re thinking badly of someone then that’s just as terrible as being openly rude or derogative to their face. That was radical thinking then. It is still radical today.

Some people suggest that as long as you don’t hurt other people then you can do, say or think whatever you like. It’s not true. That’s not right.

Our thoughts might be secret, but I know people who haven’t spoken to siblings, parents, children or friends for decades. Someone said or did something they didn’t like, the situation blew up and a grudge has been held since 1982 or 1965 or 1977. The other person doesn’t know what happened just that they might get a Christmas card and that is the only communication they have. The person with the grudge is being eaten up inside, as they revisit the grievance regularly and they know that they were in the right. They were wondered party. This bitterness takes hold of a person’s life and they continue to suffer, rather than choosing to forgive and moving on.

In the first reading, Paul gave us a list of 8 things to ponder on each day. Things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Just as doctors encourage us all to take some exercise regularly, so we are being encouraged to take mental or spiritual exercises every day too. As we talk and listen to Jesus, our Shepherd and King, every day, so He strengthens us and helps us to do things in a positive manner, to say things in a positive manner and to think things in a positive manner.

I’m not a philosopher and my Latin is also a bit rusty from school, but I’m going to say a Latin phrase and some of you clever and intellectual folk will be able to tell the rest of us what it means. Cogito, ergo sum. “I think, therefore I am” A 17<sup>th</sup> century French chap called Descartes came up with this proposition.

I want to change it slightly! “I think is often what I might become.” If we regularly think badly of people, we’ll end up saying bad things to people or not acting honourably towards others.

God wants to change us. He wants to transform us. We are all precious to Him. I think highly of Gill, my wife, and regularly think god thoughts about her. When we’re together I’ll regularly be saying nice things about her to her face. I don’t decide to do it just to make her feel good (though I do want her to feel marvellous about herself), I say them because they come out of my mouth without me trying hard at all.

We don’t have to be like other people you may know who tear you down by their words and actions. We can be a transforming power of light and salt in the relationships we have. We can bring hope and encouragement to others by the way we think, as often our thoughts will translate into actions.

Let’s be prepared to think well of others this week, even if they say or do something that makes us a little unhappy. Let’s aim to be encouragers and enablers this week. Working at thinking about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy will certainly push us in the right direction.