

Long, long ago and far away, somebody once said to me: “You don’t look Catholic!”

The circumstances don’t matter to us today, but that comment “You don’t look Catholic” has remained with me ever since.

Unlike many other faiths, Christians, apart from nuns, priests and members of certain Protestant groups, we don’t wear any distinctive garb. This goes right back to the origins of the Church. In fact there is a document from the second century A.D. called ‘the Epistle to Diognetus’, which states “For the **Christians** are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity.”

So what is special about being a Christian? If Christians were so inoffensive, so invisible, why were they persecuted? Well way back then, as right up to the present day members of the Church have stood out from the crowd. As the author of that epistle writes: “**Christians** dwell in the world, yet are not of the world”. He says Christians are the soul of society, the soul being that part which is aligned on what God wants. What marks out Christians? Their lives, their values, and though this may not seem much, the reaction is often fierce.

Today we celebrate the moment Jesus begins his mission to help humanity align itself ever more closely on God. Right from the beginning it is clear that his Way, his Truth, his Life that he brings is somehow different, new and challenging. It is because of who he is that we can find out and be who we really are. By becoming one of us, the Son of God shows us that we are sons and daughters of God.

If you have found the Brexit debate of the last few years difficult, then I have bad news for you. It is not over. But today, put aside thoughts about which colour passport you will carry and give thanks to God that our true identity is revealed by Jesus. As that early Christian author put it, we are “citizens of heaven”. This identity is established, not by a piece of paper, but by our way of life. Not by what we look like, but what we are.

Canon Paschal Ryan

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