

Cath and I are beginning to organise our move, scheduled for the late autumn, and we find we have to downsize significantly. In fact, we started ridding ourselves of unwanted clutter some months ago, and it's beginning to feel as if some progress is now being made. Getting rid of many of our books was a wrench but having done it, I find I can't remember most of what has gone! I have cleared and emptied drawers in my study, and filled bags with paperwork going back years that will be taken for recycling. I can even see the surface of my desk! The desk has to go as well of course. I'm delighted that we have found a local home for our dining table and chairs, which will be the hardest to let go of; they were given to us at just the right moment in our lives as I started my ministry and they have many stories to tell, having seen many family, friends and parish occasions. We can't take them with us, but they are going to a local family home, to be taken on at just the right time for them.

We're really looking forward to living in a far less cluttered home, and the truth is we have allowed things to get out of hand. Living with less space to fill, we will be forced to organise far better. It is actually a great feeling to finally get rid of things we haven't used for decades. Inherited family photographs will be a problem, and hard decisions will need to be made about these and other things, but I think we are on a journey from 'what must we get rid of?' to 'what do we really need to keep?'

But behind all of this, there is another lesson. A distant cousin of Cath's, who is a very committed Christian, lives in another country, returning to Oxford annually. He lives quite simply, and I remember him once saying: 'don't sit too heavily on the things of this world.' Jesus once taught us "do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6: 19-20). Clearing away the clutter in our homes can be a spiritual exercise, a kind of metaphor for the need to examine the clutter in our lives.

I came across a prayer for such an occasion and I believe the final part of it is quite helpful.

"May this culling become more than a physical act of decluttering. May it also be for us a season of glad examination of our own hearts and habits, of the ways in which we have stewarded all that has been entrusted to us. Let us learn better this day what it means to travel light through this short life, holding loosely our material possessions, storing instead our truer treasures in heaven, and directing the increase of our devotions more constantly toward you".

Simon