

lifestyle choice. Of the consequent breakdown of family life and hundreds of thousands of abortions carried out as acts of contraception. Of a vast cultural and intellectual depravity, mass ignorance in which the pursuit of the treasures of our civilisation are dismissed as *elitism*.

This should come as no surprise. It has happened before and we have its happening and the reasons for its happening set out for us in history and the Scriptures. Those who remain of us clinging to our Christian civilisation, to God's laws, God's teaching and to the Blessed Sacrament will go into exile. It may not develop into a physical and geographical exile. But it will certainly be a cultural and religious exile. Behold, the exile has begun already. *City City. Blessed City. See how the City lieth desolate. It is nothing to you, all ye that pass by? See if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow!*

And God's truth, God's Word and Sacraments, knowledge of the love of God, will have to be guarded and preserved by little pockets of faithful people. These people will be – they already are – as unpopular in our day as Jeremiah was in his. I know because I am one of these people. I know what it is to be an alien in my own land. And I am only a lad, but I have this promise:

Behold saith the Lord, I will bring thee again from captivity, because they called thee an outcast. I will restore health unto thee. And ye shall be my people and I will be your God.

I am only a lad. I knew I was only a lad – a lad such as might work down the pit at Allerton Bywater like all the men in Fr Thornton's family.

Now these two prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah are the greatest voices in the Old Testament. These voices break into English Christianity in the music of Handel. And in their own day they faced similar political crises. In Isaiah's time the country was under threat of invasion from both Assyria and Egypt. Isaiah calmed the nation's fears and told the people that Jerusalem would not fall to the enemy. In Jeremiah's time the threat came from the great empire of Persia – modern day Iraq, as it happens - the old Babylon, from King Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah dismayed the Jews by telling them that Nebuchadnezzar would invade and capture Jerusalem, the City would fall and the people be carried off into captivity by the waters of Babylon. You can imagine this went down like a sack of coal. You know what they did – they took Jeremiah and sent him down the pit, they put him in the mire, branded him a traitor. But Jeremiah outraged them even more. The week before the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem he started buying up fields just when the bottom had fallen out of the real estate market. So he was branded not just a defeatist, but as a traitorous property-speculator as well.

But Jeremiah protested. He had bought his field as a sign of confidence and hope. Yes, Jerusalem would fall and the people be taken into captivity. But they would be back. And they were. And seventy years later Jerusalem was restored and the second temple built under Ezra and Nehemiah. And Jeremiah's descendants benefited from their grandad's prophetic prudence.

Much of what I'm now going to say, you won't like. It may strike you as not very nice. I am only a lad. Perhaps you'll want to send me down the pit, put me in the mire. Because I think the signs are we are today in similar circumstances to those of Jeremiah's day. No, I don't think London will fall to a foreign power tomorrow. I don't think we're all going to be carried off to Baghdad. I am speaking about the future of Christian civilisation in Europe.

Jeremiah said to his people: *Look, you've got two problems. You face two threats. One from inside and the other from outside. The inside threat is your own making. You have turned away from God. You have ignored God's laws. The outside threat comes from Nebuchadnezzar's expansionist empire.*

So today, I don't need to tell you what the outside threat is and where it comes from. Though the countries of western Europe's refusal to face it means that we might very well die of appeasement under the guise of political correctness. But the inside threat is just as plain. We too have turned away from God and his laws. We know it every time we hear people talk of our *secular society* as if it were a good thing. But what is a secular society? It is an atheistic society. It is an immoral and literally demoralised society. It is a brainless, uncritical, intellectually bankrupt and culturally decadent society.

We are demoralised because we have rejected God's laws. We inhabit a land desolated by cheap entertainment and the idolatrous celebrity culture. Of drug abuse and the squalor of public life. Of promiscuity made routine and re-described as a

Sermon for Fuellers' Sunday...

I feel I have an affectionate connection with fuellers which goes back long before I received the honour of being appointed Chaplain to the Worshipful Company. I was a lad, only a lad, a lad growing up in Leeds in the 1950s between New Wortley gas works and Kirkstall power station. Where Elgar might recall a childhood in the Malverns and Housman those blue remembered hills, I could look south to Skelton Grange power station and on a clear day, from the tower of St Bartholomew's church, as far as Drax and Ferry Bridge.

Those were the days when you waited in for the coalman to deliver and you were left by your mother with instructions to count the sacks as he dropped them into the cellar – *because he's been known to charge for six when he's only left five. So you listen and count 'em in!* It was excruciatingly embarrassing because I knew that the coalman knew I was counting. And before he went he'd knock at the door and say *Aye lad, you can tell your mother I've left six.* But my fuelling connections go further than that.

I was bowling a tennis ball one day at some stumps I'd chalked on the wall of the Methodist chapel. This figure in a cassock approached. He was that most dangerous of characters – a high church Anglican priest. All the folk on our street were either godless puritans or what was worse, Methodists. They hated the priests from St Bartholomew's, the parish church. And Mrs Hargreaves at number ten used to point her finger and denounce what she called *their satanic vestments*. I wasn't interested in Anglicans or Methodists. I was interested in girls – excessively so. So when a priest all in black came on the scene you didn't need teaching to feel guilty.

This priest was called Fr Thornton, Fr John Thornton, and he was from Allerton Bywater, near Castleford where his father and all his uncles were miners. He pointed at me and said, *I want to see you at Mass on Sunday.* And God knows why, but I went. I was a bit late and the servers and the choir and the clergy were already processing up the north aisle – in their full satanic vestments. The Schultze organ was roaring frighteningly and they were all singing the hymn *Blessed City* to the glorious tune by Henry Purcell. That was it with me. I was completely captivated. My dad always said I behaved as if I'd been born yesterday – but I knew that morning I'd been born again.

Born into the lovely sound and colour of Anglican worship, the English version of God's truth. I went every week. Dammit, I went nearly every day. The neighbours were disgusted. My parents were frightened frankly. Here was a lad who couldn't get up for school at half past eight, now going to the seven o'clock Mass. And on Sundays nearly all Fr Thornton's sermons would have something about coalmining in them. And I decided I wanted to be ordained. I wanted some satanic vestments of my own.

Fr Thornton said I should study the Bible to test my vocation. There were two traditional responses to God's call, he said. There was Isaiah bold as brass telling God *Here am I – send me.* Then there was Jeremiah, trying to get out of it, *Ah Lord God! Behold I cannot speak: for I am a child.* Or, a more faithful translation of the Hebrew