

Easter Sermon 2006...

The gospels began to be written down not long after the first Easter – when certainly the disciples were still alive. Now here's what I find truly impressive: the gospels do not flinch from telling us that the disciples were cowards; they let Jesus down; Peter particularly denied him with curses; they ran away. And yet they are changed by Our Lord's resurrection and they come back and preach, teach and work miracles just as he predicted they would. They gave their lives as the first Christian martyrs. But they did not spin the gospel narrative to show themselves up in a good light. Just think of that: it's another good reason for trusting the reliability of the gospels – if you still think such reasons are required.

Compare and contrast. Some modern disciples of Christ – prominent leaders of the church - have denied him and traduced the gospel for forty years. But they have not come back to make good. Certainly none has been martyred. One only thinks the pity is that, having done such damage to the church, they did not imitate the first disciples on Maundy Thursday and run away. And stayed away. Instead they have hung around, clinging to their mitres, their palaces and to their vast and effete synodical bureaucracy. And the result of all their doings has undermined the gospel and the church.

I want to spell out exactly how the leaders of our church have failed us for two generations and – because Easter Sunday is about new life – what we must do to repair the damage. First they have failed by sidelining to the point of destruction our sacred texts in English: *The King James Bible*, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Latin Mass. They have done this partly because of their slavish attachment to modernity – as if it were an item of their faith that today always knows more and better than yesterday. They have also invented new and ugly forms of services, rather as many modern architects design ugly buildings – because they despise the past and are envious of their elders and betters. Unable to produce anything themselves which is other than ugly and already crumbling with obsolescence before the foundations are finished, they wish only to pull down and destroy the good that has gone before.

The modern services don't do what they were meant to do. The period of liturgical revision - really vandalism – has seen the biggest desertion of the pews in all church history. And why? Because the new services are not memorable. There is nothing of the beauty of holiness in them. They are really vapid and useless. When we hear the words of this morning's service, or Evensong or read the English Bible, we are drawn into the vastness and vast intimacy of the presence of God. The new services are banal. They are the theological equivalent of junk food.

It needs to be said also that the new services have destroyed the splendour of the Anglican tradition of worship and spirituality in another way. The failed new words don't fit the marvellous old tunes. So they have to provide us with some failed new tunes as well. Last week I had to attend a Chrism Mass in Bloomsbury and the tune for the revamped – actually utterly ruined – *Gloria in Excelsis* was bad enough to win the Eurovision Song Contest. There is no such thing as noble truth in ignoble words. And there is no such thing either as spiritual uplift in dumbed down musical doggerel, the twang of the liturgical guitar, the choir replaced by the *song group* who only know three musical chords.

Lex orandi lex credendi. How we pray reveals what we believe. The lousy new liturgists accuse people like me of merely liking what is beautiful. It says something about them doesn't it that they should think a taste for beauty is a crime? But when you change the words you inevitably change the meaning of what is being said. And the new services have emasculated and undermined Christian truth. This is because they don't face the facts of life. Anything not nice – like sin and judgement – has been fairly thoroughly expunged. This is to offer a lying vision of human nature.

We need to know that we are sinners under judgement, for only then can we kneel down and receive the glorious gospel of God's forgiveness. One wants to ask this failed leadership charlatans and incompetents, these euphemising bourgeois, why they jump up and down and throw their arms in the air so much. What is there to be joyful about? If we were not mired in sin, why should Christ bother to come and save us? The modern theologians fail to understand human psychology. They underplay human wickedness with the result that they are bound also to underplay redemption. They may pipe but I will not dance to their tune. No evil, no death, no worms, no vile bodies – so all their talk of salvation is worthless, for all their banana-split smiles and hideous backslapping.

Because church leaders don't know what a genuine religious book is, because they fail to understand human psychology, they necessarily go wrong when they turn to morality. If they do not know what manner of men we *are*, how can they prescribe for what we shall *do*? So they signed up to all the permissive legislation in the 1960s and 70s with the social chaos and destruction of the family which was always the predicted result.

It was leading churchmen at the time who supported abortion law reform. (By the way when you hear the word *reform* you should usually read it as *destruction*). They supported reform because they said it would do away with dangerous back street abortion. What it is has actually done is to legalise 200,000 abortions every year in Britain alone: in effect to use abortion as a form of contraception. The hierarchy in that decade turned out books every week on what they giddily welcomed as *the new morality*. In the new morality, it was said, we don't need rules for sexual coupling: all you need is love.

Homosexual law reform was designed to decriminalise private activities between consenting adults. I supported it then and I would support it now. Christians should not go in for homophobia or as it used to be called *queer-bashing*. But let me remind you: *private* meant behind locked doors; *between* means two; and *adult* meant twenty-one. But now look what we have: the love that once dare not speak its name screaming at us in high camp from Gay Pride floats along The Strand.

The result of the new morality is the destruction of the family, the loss of all sense of faithfulness and the trivialisation of sex – really abolishing morality and replacing morality with *lifestyle choices*. You ask the question, *What is permitted?* And the answer turns out to be *Do as you like*. And so the much-vaunted new morality was only the old immorality in a miniskirt. But, as we are finding out, our deeds have consequences for our lives.

So what is to be done? We are a generation in chaos, a decadent civilisation under judgement. There are four things we must do if we want to avoid destruction. We must recover intellectual rigour. We must understand what manner of people we are: not rather nice people actually who have no need of the Saviour; but sinners under judgement. We must recover moral seriousness and return to the laws which God set down under Moses. That is we must stop regarding men and women as mere consumers of sensations and thrills – any thrill will do. This is the pig philosophy which destroys the dignity of mankind made in the image of God.

We must turn again to the beauty of holiness. Words and music that reveal the world charged with the grandeur of God. We must stop trivialising holy things. Not just sacred books. Two more practical examples: be silent before you receive Holy Communion, and don't chatter with your neighbour until the service is over and you can pour him a drink at the back. Supremely, if Our Lord said *This is my Body*, he was either a megalomaniac and a lunatic or what he said was true. So we must reverence the Blessed Sacrament, reverencing it for what it is.

And most importantly of all, we must ask God to make us *desire* him. St Augustine said that the best way to understand how much God loves us is to think of erotic love between a man and his wife. We must ask God to kindle in us an intensity of affection and desire for him that will transform our lives. We don't adore God naturally. We must beg him to *make* us desire him.

All this is not for the hierarchy to do. They have failed. They are apostate. They won't do it. *We* must do it. You and me. Here and now. *For God has made us for himself and our hearts are restless till they rest in him.*