

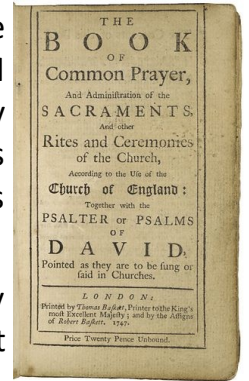
A message
from Revd. Ben Thompson



In a recent interview, Ian Hislop recounted a story from the 1990s. It had transpired that a *Mirror* journalist had approached his Vicar to ask if Hislop had confessed a sin to him which was a matter of public interest. Recounting this story, Hislop laughed as he suggested that the Journalist had misunderstood the practice of the Church of England which, he told his interviewer, “Practises general confession, not private confession to a priest”.

Hislop is not entirely right: the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* provides for private confession when a person is approaching death. Today, in response to the awful experiences some have had at the hands of ill-trained and/or self-important clergy of several denominations, the CofE provides authorised texts, training, regulations (such as preventing those who, like me, are only recently ordained from offering this ministry) and legal frameworks for confession.

In my experience, making private confessions has always left me feeling utterly liberated and joyful. Each time, I relearn that the gravitational pull of self-interest does not have a hold over my being or ultimate end.



And so, dear reader, in the words of the modern CofE text, “I confess to almighty God, before the whole company of heaven, and before you,” that I struggle to write ‘thought’ pieces such as this. Unlike Billy Connolly’s apocryphal *Thought for the Day* minister, I do not support Tottenham Hotspur, and nor do I think that, in a “Funny way”, Jesus played for Tottenham Hotspur. I can only offer the personal reflections which emerge from doing my best to serve anxious communities where I, sometimes daily, encounter experiences of both unspeakable joy and unbelievable evil.

Recently, whilst I was silently confessing my anger and frustration in one of our churches, I noticed the image of ‘the pelican in her piety’ for the first time. According to a slightly dubious ancient dictionary of animals, the mother pelican pecks at herself to feed her offspring with her blood. Biological fiction aside, the image redirected my mind to the sacrificial actions I have witnessed recently which have brought me hope: the teenage boy who, risking social status, hugged their mate whilst they were crying in response to a family trauma; the person who courageously chose to vulnerably share their pain with someone who upset them rather than hold a grudge; the person who voluntarily chose to leave behind their successful career and prospective promotions to care for their partner’s elderly parent.



When I made my first confession, the priest assured me that he would never repeat what I said not just because of the legal requirements. He said he would forget because “Sin is boring. Everyone does it. Choosing to make the difficult choice to actually do something good is far more interesting.”

Whilst private confession may not be of interest to you, maybe it is worth considering how heavy you currently find the weight of self-interest; maybe it is worth considering what is preventing you from being genuinely interesting; maybe it is worth considering what you would want others to say about you should a journalist ever start calling around the village! Why not try freedom from feeling shame: you might even enjoy it!

