

‘THIS TOO SHALL PASS’

Not the parish pew sheet

A miscellany of matter serious and not so serious

Issue number 43: Epiphany II

The voice of singing has been silenced again; but the music goes on in heaven, as described by the sixteenth-century writer known only as ‘F.B.P.’:

There David stands with harp in hand
As master of the choir:¹
Ten thousand times that man were blest
That might this music hear.

Our Lady sings Magnificat
With tune surpassing sweet;
And all the Virgins bear their parts,
Sitting about her feet.

Te Deum doth Saint Ambrose sing,
Saint Austin doth the like;
Old Simeon and Zachary
Have not their songs to seek.

Jerusalem, my happy home,
Would God I were in thee!
Would God my woes were at an end
Thy joys that I might see!

Jane Williams, in another excerpt from The Art of Advent, reminds us why the Church exists:

Our gift and calling as Church are not that we are good where others are not, or that we have had the sense to know God where others have not, but that God has called us to be a sign and a foretaste of the coming kingdom, where all human beings recover their relatedness to each other, because they have been adopted by God. For all its failures and active faults, the Church has still, miraculously, almost in spite of itself, spread the good news that God has come to make a home in every nation under the sun, and belongs equally in every place and in every heart.

Fanaticism has been much in the news recently; Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch, in his introduction to A History of Christianity, puts its origins in a nutshell:

There is no surer basis for fanaticism than bad history, which is invariably history oversimplified.

And note also this opinion from the twentieth-century thinker Jean-François Revel:

Ideology functions as a machine to destroy information, even at the price of making assertions in clear contradiction of the evidence.

¹ Note the pronunciation of ‘choir’ implied by the rhyme.

If you thought last week's examples of fractured English were extreme examples, try these. The first two are from the instructions for a miniature golf course in Ostend; the third was found on a ticket attached to a lamp for sale in Estoril.

Level with the feet holes or mound do by playing on the game.

No working players are invited to stay on the stony mat.

The present lamp is a reply of the used's in almost every's the province from Portugal, among the century XVII–XIX even a usage in some recondite's and old village's. Wholesome to illumination to middle by oil; the that empty of & deposit, and immediately kindle the wick's. The pincer, bucket, etc., from some, sound towards clean the wick's of the burning.

I mentioned Václav Havel's characterisation of hope a fortnight ago: here is another one, from the American writer Rebecca Solnit, quoted by the novelist Carys Bray in the Church Times:

Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency.² Hope should shove you out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures, and the grinding down of the poor and marginal.

Taking up again the theme of the Church, and particularly of the saints, listen to Austin Farrer, in Words for Life, on the subject:

The commemoration of All Saints is not concerned with those who lived particularly holy lives on earth, but with those whom the power of God has remade and brought through to heaven. To believe in the real existence of this great company is not to believe in something called the soul, which cannot die: it is to believe in God, and in his will to save us alive and bring us near himself . . . Religion is not fundamentally a battle against sin, it is a drawing up together into glorification.

And finally, to prove that preachers can trip over their tongues as much as any sports commentator, consider this from Derek Nimmo's Oh, Come On All Ye Faithful!:

There was a preacher who denounced the husband who spent all his evenings drinking, 'while the poor wife rocks the cradle with one foot and wipes her eyes with the other'.

Readings

For this Sunday (Epiphany II) I Samuel 3: 1–20; Revelation 5: 1–10; John 1: 43–51

Psalm 139: 1–5, 12–18

For next Sunday (Epiphany III) Genesis 14: 17–20; Revelation 19: 6–10; John 2: 1–11

Psalm 128

Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth: mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

Collect for the Second Sunday after Epiphany

² I am reminded of the episode in *Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian remembers the key called Promise which will deliver him and his companion from their imprisonment by Giant Despair in Doubting Castle.