

Whitsunday 2018

If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...." John 14.15

Words so beautiful and so familiar to us from the motet by Tallis, which we heard again yesterday at the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. It is a few years since the last Royal wedding and it set me reflecting on my own reactions and those of a watching nation-and not just a nation but a world: 1.9 or 2 Billion people are reckoned to have seen the wedding in Windsor.

It was a fairy-tale occasion, with the best possible weather that the British Isles could provide, with the colour and pageantry that the British do better than anyone else. As an aside, it interests me that so many citizens of countries with what might be described politely as a 'monarchy deficit' are completely captivated by such an event. Two brothers, walking side by side, to church. The castle with flags and streamers, the liveried trumpeters, the carriage and horses, the dress....fairy-tale is the right word, and the preacher, whatever one made of the delivery-style, reminding us of the power of God's love to make this old world new.

In amongst the fairy-tale, however, were the solemn reminders of how we human beings can get it wrong: whether it be the sight, still shocking for the British, of armed police visibly on duty, or the not-always-comfortable realities of international showbiz life woven into the fabric of the day; and of course, some of the guests themselves reminding the viewing millions that marriage does not always have a fairy-tale ending. The immediate families of both bride and groom have known that sadness: and yet, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex have resolved that they will do their utmost to love and cherish one another, faithfully for the rest of their lives. I hope that even the most hard-hearted republican would wish God's blessing upon them in this honest and moving human endeavour. On their wedding day, on every wedding day, bride and groom offer a joyful and God-given sign of encouragement to all around them that it is possible that what is old shall be made new, that what is broken shall find healing and that, in the words of the preacher yesterday, this old world will be made into a new one.

It was especially exciting for me that, to the viewing billions around the world, to the cynics and non-believers alike, the simple truths of the Catholic Christian faith were set forth yesterday in St George's Chapel, Windsor: we take it for granted because we come here every week. But for many, it will have been strange and unfamiliar. Thanks be to God

that something of the Christian Gospel was shared with the whole world yesterday. A great and timely gift.

And in amongst it, whatever one made of the style, there was a simple message from the preacher that the love of God will make all things new: even this broken, unjust, unfair world in which we live and of which we seem never to tire of making a mess through our frailties and vanities. Dealing with the whole problem is overwhelming....which then begs the question "Where do we start? How do I do something that makes a difference?"

On Whitsunday we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: giving new life to lifeless situations and granting right judgement, in God's good time, in perplexing questions and bringing healing and reconciliation in seemingly impossible and hopeless situations. We pray and sing for these gifts, this bounty, year by year. A good way for us to signal that our hearts are *docile to the will of God*, as we prayed earlier this week, *docile to the will of God* would be for us to take seriously the call of Christian Aid this year. The envelopes are available today, as last week, and we have until 3 June to return them. Christian Aid does a great work, in many parts of the world where life is more of an unending nightmare for people than a fairy-tale. Have a look at their website or their magazine and ask God to help you respond to their willingness to be part of his work of making this old world new. We cannot solve it overnight, but we can do *something*. That something may just make the difference for a child or a family or an old woman, bringing a ray of sunshine, of hope into lives that have known little by way of love or encouragement.

As we celebrate the feast of Whitsun, we pray that God will once again pour the fire of his love into our hearts, that fire which is ever ancient, ever new, giving us the courage and wisdom to share the good news of his love with the world around us, in our words and in our deeds. May he so bless you this Whitsuntide. Amen.

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