

..a man's rank means nothing to you. This is dissembling talk on the part of the Herodeans and Pharisees sent to trap Jesus into either support for Caesar or opposition. They use truth deceitfully. Today, for the first time perhaps, since the Reformation, we will have the privilege of celebrating a Roman Catholic Sunday Eucharist in the Anglican Parish Church of All Saints and I'm acutely conscious of choosing appropriate words to mark this occasion without appearing to take sides, to be vainglorious, to see this as any other than a fortuitous event occasioned by the tragedy of Covid-19 and the kindness of the Anglican Community in Turvey. It is not a 'yes' or 'no' event as the opponents of Jesus were so keen to contrive, but a rather wonderful example of how God writes straight on crooked lines; of how misfortune can yet contain the seeds of good fortune; of how cross and resurrection are not only the pattern of our lives as Christian believers but of all life. And Jesus well knew the subtlety of God's great design, for although he escapes the trap this time he has by so doing merely enraged his opponents further. The cross will come but it will be in some strange way God's doing – misfortune once again at the service of the greater good. Every word here can, of course, be misunderstood and argued over, but I think of Job and God's permission to the devil to test him, and of Isaiah's stark statement that God is responsible for evil as well as good. It's a statement which gives hope, for implicit in it is the acknowledgement that good, that the good God, will prevail. In *All Saints* we are surrounded by the tombs and effigies of the Mordaunts who remained Catholic throughout the Reformation and were powerful enough still to be honoured after death by these very public monuments. But our stance now has not to be one of a triumphant, 'Look! We're back. Rome has triumphed after all!' but 'Look we're back' and feel at home because there have been other Christians here to welcome us as fellow human beings in need of shelter. It is their love which speaks more strongly and whatever faith these splendid Mordaunt figures showed it will be their love also which will be their final testimony – and of this we know too little. This is why, although Jesus has trounced his opponents in this gospel passage, we are not to assume it was for lack of love. God's intention is not for us to defend ourselves behind various verbal and doctrinal battlements but to speak our truth in love and, even better, to demonstrate it first in deed and discover, perhaps, that words, those accursed things, are not, indeed, needed.

'*A man's rank means nothing to you*' could well be said of those various Mordaunts and, of course, of us. It's not the monuments we leave behind that matter but the quality of our presence to one another now.

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