

In a rare moment of self-indulgence (ahem!), I recently watched a film on D-Day from a French perspective: the Americans and Canadians and the French themselves, and even the Germans, came out of it rather well, but the British, or more particularly the English, personified or rather vilified in the person of General Montgomery, somewhat less so. This bias, however, couldn't take away the obvious courage and self-possession demanded of the soldiers, sailors, citizens and airmen involved. I was watching it partly because my own father took part in this battle as a sailor on one of the many destroyers involved, and I remember him telling me of how his ship would sail from Portsmouth each day to bombard the beaches, or rather the targets still resisting, and return to port in the evening to refuel and rearm, giving the men the opportunity for a brief run ashore – and the bizarre experience of sitting in an English pub in the evening, enjoying a peaceful pint and unable to tell anyone what was really going on.

The thought of this episode is prompted by our own mixed experience of what it is to be Christian and, of course, of that of Peter and Paul, crystallised perhaps, in Peter's experience of being, at one moment, cast into gaol and, the next, finding himself released as if in a dream; one moment suffering and the next, not. We see this pattern throughout their respective careers. Peter, affirmed and commissioned, today, to lead his Church while the next passage in the gospel will show him full of fear at the prospect of Christ's suffering, of Christ taking up his cross, while we see Paul, at the end of his many sufferings in the service of the Lord and awaiting his end, but with great peace. And the link for me was provided in a commentary on the immediately preceding verse in Paul's second letter to Timothy where he says

you must keep steady all the time: put up with suffering: do the work of preaching the gospel: fulfil the service asked of you.

And this service and attitude the commentary likens to 'the self-possession expected of a bishop.' Now, my father would be somewhat surprised to hear of his self-possession as being likened to that of a bishop but as the commentary goes on to say we are not being called as Christians to endure suffering for suffering's sake but rather 'to suffer the consequences for proclaiming and living the Gospel'. In other words, in fulfilling this duty one can find peace: the peace the angel visited on Peter in prison, on Paul at the end of his life and (dare I say?) on my father as he sat with his pint in a pub in Fareham, after a duty well done.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour