

Homily for Brother Herbert Kaden OSB

Funeral Mass, All Saints Parish Church, Turvey
Thursday November 3, 2022

We had the privilege of hearing the Beatitudes two days ago on the Feast of All Saints and I've chosen it today because it was one of Br. Herbert's favourite texts, as well as the whole Sermon on the Mount, and I wondered as I heard it read how much indeed it could be made to apply to Br. Herbert – translating [the Greek word] *Makarios* as Blessed rather than Happy - because Br. Herbert was not always happy, you may or may not be surprised to hear, but he was certainly blessed and able to bless others as a result. We'll work our through the list and see how we go:

How blessed are the poor in spirit...

- Not spiritually poor but in the sense of being so empty of self that God can get a word in – we're talk of humility here, best characterised in Br. Herbert by his willingness to hear and to accede to the wishes of others – sometimes excessively so, but a trait that ultimately stood him in good stead – so he learns on the Isle of Man to curb his anger at being interned as an enemy alien. 'It was Markus, a devout Christian, who said, "You are grumbling but you can see the sea and the gulls – you should be grateful!" I have never forgotten this', he replies.

Blessed the gentle...

- Well he was certainly a gentleman – not only to fellow human beings but to creation generally – learning the Buddhist practice of stepping carefully and forever picking up the ailing insects and releasing them outdoors – obsessive perhaps but training him to observe and to care and to keep his carbon footprint small.

Blessed those who mourn...

- Dom Gregory once told me Br Herbert had no defences – he was completely open to the emotional wounds of others and sometimes taken advantage of as a result. We had to provide those defences for him, our little joke being that he would bring people in – in all states of distress – and it was our job to see them out – but they were all the better for seeing Br. Herbert and we were all the better for seeing them.

Blessed those who hunger and thirst for what is right...

- Br Herbert had a very keen sense for what was and wasn't right, sometimes justly and sometimes not, but again his passion for others was a great lesson for the rest of us – whatever was really going on, the person couldn't be ignored.

Blessed the merciful

- Always mercy, always kindness – kinship one might say to the fore – lessons he learnt early no doubt from his mother Lalla, but captured in these words from Fr Peter at St Edmund's House in Cambridge – Br. Herbert confesses he has broken silence on retreat and is told 'charity comes before silence' – this led to some difficulty at times but again a great lesson for the rest of us – putting law in its place.

Blessed the pure in heart

- There was no side to Br Herbert – what you saw is what you got. I think it goes under the name ‘transparency’ and we were both very keen on the text about Nathanael – an Israelite without guile, which meant we could speak truth to one another and know we’d been heard and understood – a trait in Br. Herbert which most of you will have also known. ‘Can anything good come from Turvey?’ one might say. Yes, and you are all proof of this.

Blessed the peacemakers...

- His whole life was one of seeking reconciliation – in the early days often again excessively so, after bouts of anger, but ultimately bringing about his own integration and the deep peace which accompanied his last years – a grace as well as a work.

Blessed those persecuted in the search of right...

- It’s difficult to think of Br. Herbert as being persecuted but he certainly was by his own inner demons in the earlier years and it is a great tribute to him and to God that he finally gave up the privileging of opinions over the joy of accepting whatever and whoever came to his door – monastic hospitality proving its worth.

Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account.

- Again it is difficult to imagine anyone with a bad word to say against Brother Herbert – but does that mean his witness was lacking in some way? Not at all, or by no means as St Paul would say, his witness was so true that no words could gainsay it, including all the words I’ve just said.

Brother John,
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour, Turvey