

To give someone your full attention is to show them love – one is listening in order to understand, to know the person more fully, to be there for them in their real need – as opposed to the needs we've already decided they have, to the person we've already decided they are, to the problems we think they might present. The flip side to this of course is not presenting the full story, is not trusting ones hearers with the full truth, with doubting their ability to listen and understand, and I couldn't help wondering in a moment of wickedness this morning whether the compilers of today's readings weren't willing to trust us with the full truth because each of the readings is compromised in some way by its brevity or absence of intervening verses. The reading from Acts introduces a moving speech by Peter full of biblical allusions to show Jesus as the fulfilment of scripture but we only get the tail ending, the conclusion as it were; the letter from Peter lacks its immediate context – it is addressed to slaves; and the Gospel passage has much more to say on Jesus as the good shepherd highlighting the contrast with the people's former leaders. Are the compilers being diplomatic here unwilling perhaps to start too many hares, aware for example that slavery is much more problematic now than previously or that using too many biblical references can smack of supersessionism – the supplanting of the original people of God by another or is it simply that they are indeed aware that our present culture is characterized by attention deficit disorder and we can't rely any more on holding people's full attention for long – an act of love after all? And all this was prompted by the wonder at 3,000 people being captivated by what Peter has to say and converted, cut to the heart by his words, like those disciples on the way to Emmaus. He was able to hold their attention perhaps because he gave them his full attention, like the shepherd who knows his sheep, addressing them with words he knew they would understand as people well versed in scripture, already seeking God. And all this was prompted by reading a review in the Tablet of a book entitled 'Ravenous: How to get ourselves and our Planet into shape' co-written by Henry Dimbleby and his journalist wife Jemima Lewis – a book prompted by the complete dismissal of his earlier government-commissioned report on a National Food Strategy by a government which the reviewer describes as 'too gutless to implement'

*'Be warned: when you grasp the big picture Dimbleby so artfully paints, it will not just change your own eating habits but leave you weeping in frustration that our current political culture – enervated by populism, short-termism, individualism and corporate power- - is so obviously incapable of the bold- vision government required to change it.'*

The initial focus here was obesity but this goes for so many other issues too, including the appalling state of the river on our doorstep. Only most people don't notice because they are not paying attention. So if there's a theme in this homily today it's paying attention as the sign of the presence of God's Holy Spirit in our lives – causing our hearts to burn with love and often indignation. We've couched this finally in religious terms but its beginnings are to be found, to be practised, in whatever it is we are next called to do and for whoever it is we are next called to meet.

Just pay attention and the Holy Spirit will be there.

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