

In all these texts there is a thin line between what we might call the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’ or between ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ or even between ‘now’ and the ‘future’. There’s something going on here which is terrifying in one respect and glorifying in another: a terrestrial experience of suffering in which there are yet intimations of glory – that thin place again. Part of the terror is that the line between these two realities (though in truth only one) is that our culture’s ‘take’ on whatever is happening now, is largely secular or, in the terms of Peter and Paul’s day, understood in terms of pagan Gods. So one can read article after article in the Guardian, for example, or listen to programme after programme on Radio 4 and not realise it’s all about God. And if God is mentioned or the possibility of God explored, one can expect a certain resistance, if not downright opposition, as in Peter and Paul’s day when they dared to affirm the possibility of God becoming human and humanity becoming divine. It’s a barrier, then and now, which we cross at our peril. Teilhard de Chardin dared to do so with such statements as

*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience
We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*

though, again, the language is ambiguous or cannot quite capture it. And I would suggest that Pope Francis is trying to cross this barrier, too in his various attempts at reform only to meet great opposition from those who would prefer to keep things clear and distinct: to keep the barrier in place between the human and the divine and to keep Peter and the Petrine office, or priests generally, firmly in control of the negotiations – of negotiating this thin divide. But the other lesson from this text is that God ultimately holds the keys, and the role of such as Peter and Paul – and ourselves – is to be so finely tuned to both the spiritual and the terrestrial, or the human and the divine, that they become one, or are seen as the one reality they already are, so that

Whatever we bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven.

and

Whatever we loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.

It’s a tricky one which will bring condemnation on all who attempt to practise it both within and without ‘the Church’ – or ‘the Church’ as we see it.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour