

How quickly churches become fortresses- symbols of power or rather of fear. I'm tussling here with two sets of readings and two wonderful Churches placed like sentinels at either end of the main east-west road through Turvey, fortunately not in competition and very much open for people to visit, for the stranger to find a home, a place of refuge, of peace; safe interiors with only a few crenellations to put people off. Or, so one hopes, for it's so easy as we hear in today's Sunday readings, to lose the spirit of a place through poor leadership and fear of enemies. Instead of peace we find rivalry, one set of people exalting themselves over and against another, both within and without the worshipping community or, as St Augustine puts it so beautifully in last night's vigil reading

*"by becoming Christian (we) are like stones newly quarried on the mountains or timber felled in the forests. When (we) are catechised, baptised, formed (we) are, as it were, hewn at the hands of workers and craftsmen, ( we) are set in line, and evened up.*

*Nevertheless (we) do not make a house of God unless (we) are cemented together by love. If those beams of wood and those stones of the church were not joined to one another in a definite pattern, if they were not peacefully intertwined, if they did not by mutual attachment in a certain sense "love" one another no one would dare to put a foot inside".*

I love that quote and have used it many times but the force of it still stands as we hear the sounds of war, the sounds of insecurity, all around us – in Israel, in Ukraine, or in so many other places, and even here in Turvey as the sound of rockets is heard to celebrate the ending of the Gunpowder Plot, sounds of insecurity for both victors and victims for there are no winners when violent conflict replaces the risky business of face to face encounter, of learning the art of peaceful confrontation, of grappling with all our human inconsistencies and difference, of settling our antagonisms before we come to court, to war, to final judgement. In other words, God is placing the possibility of final judgement with us - we can make peace now, it has already been won for us in Christ, in Christ we have the power to overcome violence with love. If our two buildings speak of anything it is this capacity for reconciliation. This said especially with Remembrance Sunday also in mind. We know very well the results of failing to be reconciled with one another and yet perversely continue to hate, to demonise one another, to keep ones enemies at a safe distance so that they can never become friends. This is when churches and states become fortresses out of fear, ghettos in which the supposed gate keepers are as much imprisoned as their supposed victors. The Scribes and the Pharisees are not so much to be condemned as pitied for as in so many conflicts they hold up a mirror as to who we so often are – victims of our own fears which rely on accentuating difference in order for us to feel safe. Fortunately, Christ does not allow us to get away with that for long and violence is ultimately it's own best teacher – it goes nowhere in the end.

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour