

The Passing of St Benedict 21.3.24

We have the great blessing, here, of not being ‘parish’ so that we can practise our faith without the cultural baggage that a Catholic parish might find itself immersed in. *We are Catholics first, and this is what defines us. And, if we attract people, it’s obviously because they want to become Catholics in this cultural vein: that is what we are here for.* We could just as equally find ourselves trapped in Benedictine baggage here: *we are Benedictines first and that is what defines us.*

Now, the easy and obvious move to make is to say, ‘*No, we are Christians first and that is what defines us*’. But that, too, can become a trap if we see it only in terms of *what* we believe in rather than *how* we believe it. I’m influenced here by a recent article in the Tablet by Austen Ivereigh exploring the work of the Czech priest- philosopher Tomas Halik who, in turn, is exploring the Church’s apparent irrelevance to so many people and concludes that: it is not the people who have left the Church but the Church that has left the people, and that faith is indeed alive outside the bounds of what we traditionally take to be Church: to quote from the article directly:

The ‘soft-secularisation’ especially among the young believers – without- belonging, the seeker-searchers, is the place where Halik discovers the ‘hidden Christian stream’ in Western culture, one that reflects an intrinsic religiosity – open, tolerant, flexible, socially sensitive, sacrificial, and sympathetic. The point is that ‘how’ we believe (fides qua) is as important as ‘what we believe (fides quae).

Or to boil it down, perhaps over simplistically, it’s not the habit that matters but how we inhabit the habit.

As Jesus prepares to depart from this life and his beloved disciples, he doesn’t hand on to them a whole series of beliefs so much as how to inhabit the habit which he himself wore. His prayer is that their relationship to the Father may be as intimate, as intricate, as complete, as his own. They are being clothed in Christ, as Christ was clothed in God: full of God’s glory, transparent to the workings of the Holy Spirit. It’s the same dynamic seen in the life and passing of St Benedict.; clothed in glory, not because of *what* he believed so much as *how* he believed it. We’re talking here, perhaps, of our own inheritance and call, to be fully human first, before we define it in any other way. We can happily go there because Christ has already been there – inhabiting the habit of humanity to its fullness.

This is Abram setting off on his journey into the unknown only to find God is with him all along.

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