

St George
23/4/26

It was instructive watching and listening to the words of Sir Olly Robbins on Tuesday as he sought to explain and defend his actions regarding the non-disclosure of the vetting decision against Sir Peter Mandelson - all worthy of an episode of 'Yes Minister', highlighting the clash of responsibilities between the governance of the politicians and that of our civil servants. Every word mattered, and was forensically weighed, only in my opinion, to be misreported by the Guardian on the following day, which stressed the pressure the civil servants are under to get a quick result as the main thrust of Sir Olly's case when it seemed to me to be part of the story only, largely stressed not by Sir Olly but by those doing the interviewing - he was being forced to accord with their agenda rather than his own. Words are then slippery things, easily bent one way or another, easily misconstrued - which may be true of my own understanding - easily ignored or easily followed.

Now all that's been said because the narrative of the Feast of St George is also easily misused. More by accident than by design the story of a heroic figure whose courage is not in doubt becomes not a religious but a political figure to celebrate nationhood and force of arms, co-opted by other forces inspired not by the Word as understood in today's gospel passage but by racial and class group thinking to justify the identity of one set of people against another. The parable of the Vine should at first sight resist such an interpretation - the emphasis is on the fruitfulness derived entirely from adhering to Christ. But that of course is where the trouble begins because within the same narrative we have the idea of some branches being cut off and burnt if they don't bear fruit. This is ammunition for all who fail to adhere fully to Christ's command to 'love one another as I have loved you'. Words are slippery things, we've already been formed by them but it's important to keep returning to that Word so that, in the words of the Quakers, 'we attend to what love requires of us', even if and especially when that goes against our will. And, also in support of a Quaker mentality, we need to remember the words of Oliver Cromwell, 'to think it possible that you may be mistaken' - now there's food for thought, with a few massacres in mind!

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