

Sunday 14A. 5.7.26

Some advice when travelling to the Holy Land as a pilgrim in the 15th century

“At Jaffa you must bestir yourself and be quick In order to have the best donkey”

The author goes on in similar vein *“for ye schal pay no more for the best than for the worst”*

Perhaps closer to Christ’s intention in riding an ass or donkey into Jerusalem was the narrator of the travels of the Lord of Anglure in the 14th century when he noted asses as the common mode of travel for even knights themselves in Jerusalem. J. J. Jusserand comments on this as a sign of the lack of robbers at this time

“If there had been any chance of real fight knights would hardly have ventured getting in to it on donkey back.” (English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages 1889)

But I wonder whether, given the history of the crusades, it wasn’t also a sign that the knights themselves came in peace and were acknowledging the power of the Sultan, perhaps indeed they had no choice. They were there as pilgrims, and welcome as long as they paid. Closer still perhaps to Christ’s intention was the British general Allenby who took possession of Jerusalem towards the end of the first world war and had the sensitivity to walk into the city rather than ride on a horse or a mule or a donkey or an ass – or rather was persuaded to do so by the Foreign Office to avoid a Kaiser- like or Christ-like entrance. You see how significant symbols are and open to multiple interpretations. This also goes for the yoke we place on beasts of burden – not singly but in pairs which gives it its other meaning of “balance”, it’s a symbol of not only bearing a weight but of being under judgement, weighed in the scales. So we can also see it as a sign that we do not travel this road to Jerusalem alone, and this in multiple ways also for the burden we carry is made lighter or heavier by the spirit in which we relate to one another for Christ is there in our neighbour as much as in ourselves. Pull together and the burden is light. So when Paul talks of the spiritual as opposed to the unspiritual he is not contrasting body and soul, flesh and spirit, but talking of the body as fully possessed by the Spirit of Christ or, just as well, as the Spirit as fully enfleshed or embodied, incarnated one might say in Christ. This is Christ as so enlivening us that we become Christ to others and so able and willing to carry their burdens that our own burden is lightened also. It’s a sharing of the load or the power of the Spirit.

“The Lord is faithful in all his words

And loving in all his deeds

The Lord supports all who fall

And raises all who are bowed down.”

No, the Lord is not competing for the best donkey but willing to wait until the right one comes. If we co-operate with God and one another, God cooperates with us. It's all a matter of balance.

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