

## PETRINE ROCK HOMILY 2.

22<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY:

Jer.20:7-9; Rom.12:1-2; Matt.16:21-27.

Last week we were facing our need for law and order; both in wider society and in the Church. To assist us in this, I explored Peter Hall's recent production of Shakespeare's Henry IV. The background to these plays is what Shakespeare called 'the civil broil' of the Wars of the Roses – a nation torn apart. Bolingbroke, now King Henry is struggling to establish that law and order which is so desperately needed. But this is clearly a flawed law and order. Bolingbroke has been involved in some pretty dodgy practises to get where he is. He has been 'blood-sprinkled to make him grow'- the shadow of responsibility for the murder of Richard 11 hangs over him. And the young, utterly loyal Prince John his son who, unlike his elder brother, pursues the path of rectitude, yet gets the rebels to lay down their arms by an act of grossest treachery. In a splendid speech Falstaff contrasts Prince John with his brother Hal, Prince of Wales. John is cold and calculating because he drinks no wine. But Prince Hal's cold blood inherited from his father, has 'like a lean sterile land been manured and tilled with good fertile sherry.' Cold law and order may not be enough. The healing of a broken society may need a king who has tasted the sherry of that racketsy sub-culture of Falstaff and so can bridge the gap between that world and orderly respectable society.

'You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church' – so said Jesus in last Sunday's gospel. But today Jesus is saying to that same Peter; 'Get behind me Satan – you are an obstacle!' Suddenly the Rock of Stability has become a Rock to be tripped over. Why? Having cried 'You are the Christ', Peter is now trying to map out the way of the Christ for him. 'We cannot have all that rejection, suffering and death stuff. That is defeatist talk! We want a Celebrity Christ without a cross – a Christ who successfully competes to get to the top rather than being the failure of extravagant love.' You see Peter is doing

what Dostoevsky, in his novel 'The Brothers Karamazov', shows the Grand Inquisitor doing. As the newly imprisoned Christ stands before the judgement of the Church, he is frankly told how his teaching has been corrected. 'We know, as any man of the world knows, that the freedom you have offered is in fact an intolerable burden which real people simply cannot handle. So we in the Church are proving more merciful as we remove that burden of freedom and instead issue clear orders and expect unquestioning obedience.'

Such is the argument of the Grand Inquisitor like Simon Peter's, the case for turning from the path of liberating love. That is how the Rock becomes the obstacle and is bluntly called Satanic. Jesus does not often use such language about human failings, but here he does. Law and Order can turn satanic. Within the Church freedom can be denied; there can be oppression and injustice, which no sprinkling of holy water can wash away.

But what then is the remedy? If we are to go on needing that Rock of Stability, how can we prevent order and authority from becoming satanic? The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council began to give an answer in what is called 'collegiality'. This is simply the way the Christian community should behave when it sees itself, not as a top-down hierarchical structure, but as the People of God. Here is a community driven by an understanding of God, not as top person shouting orders down the line, but as the Blessed Trinity of the giving and receiving of love between the equal Persons. To be truly human is to be drawn into that love, to share that love, and to live that love. And that is what 'collegiality' strives to do.

This is a vision of God and a vision of Church, which owes a lot to the thinking of Blessed John Henry Newman. He was often on the receiving end of the Grand Inquisitor's 'narrow, rigid and authoritarian' Church but he looked away to Christ as Prophet, Priest and King and in him saw the marks of authentic church

life. Newman, and his later disciple the lay theologian the Baron von Hugel, saw the need for these three elements to be embodied in the Church. Yes, there had to be the Kingly bit, the Church of Law and Order, what von Hugel called 'the Institutional' bit. But also there had to be the Priestly life, the Spiritual life, which von Hugel called the 'Mystical'- that for ever looking away to God and being overwhelmed by his glory. 'O God you are my God, for you I long.' But this worship had to be, as St Paul says, 'worship worthy of a thinking being.' So there must be the Prophetic side of the Church, what von Hugel called 'the Intellectual'- 'religion modelled by a new mind.' Christ, King, Priest and Prophet served by an Institutional, Mystical and Intellectual Church. In a healthy church all three elements must be free to flourish. No one of them must be allowed to dominate the others. The Institutional must not crush the pioneering theologian. The Intellectual must not despise the spiritual. Of course there will be tension between these three – even conflict. It has always been so and always will be so in this life. Newman was realistic about this. He pointed out that life in the Church did not mean being 'sent to bed'; but to be more like a noisy Birmingham factory, all clashing and banging. That was to be expected. The great thing was to ensure that the clashing and banging were creative and not destructive.

'Feed my sheep' says Jesus to Peter. And this is where the pastoral art of leadership in the Church comes in – whether it be that of Popes, Bishops or Parish Priests. The Leader is the Conductor of an Orchestra. As conductor, the leader has authority but it is always at the service of the Orchestra. The conductor accepts and rejoices in all this varied giftedness he leads. He or she wants them all to flourish but, as orchestra and not just as a collection of soloists. So sometimes the loud-mouthed 'tymps' must be softened, to allow the quiet reticent woodwinds to be heard. Both Orchestra and Conductor are united in this that they are all at the service of the Music. It is the Music that matters. Orchestra and Conductor are held together, not by blind obedience, but by the united desire to

make that music, the very music of the Gospel. 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of God!'

Peter Cornwell.