

Address for the week of Lent 5

Fr Paul will smile when he reads this. During a conversation we had some time ago, the work of Jeremy Taylor was mentioned. Taylor was an Anglican divine of the seventeenth century and one-time Chaplain to Charles I. Fr Paul was telling me that at his Theological college Taylor was the favourite writer of one of the staff, who regularly dipped into the collected works for inspiration (and possibly for effect!) This prompted me to get down off my book shelf and dust off my copy of his most famous work *Holy Living and Holy Dying* and resolve this Lent to use it as my inspiration.

I came across this passage in Taylor's explanation of the grace of humility:

Remember that the blessed Saviour of the world hath done more to prescribe, and transmit, and secure the grace of humility, than any other; his whole life being a great continued example of humility, a vast descent from the glorious bosom of his Father, to the womb of a poor maiden, to the form of a servant, to the miseries of a sinner, to a life of labour, to a state of poverty, to a death of malefactors, to the grave of death, and the intolerable calamities which we deserved; and it were a good design, and yet but reasonable, that we should be as humble in the midst of our greatest imperfections and basest sins, as Christ was in the midst of his fulness of the Spirit, great wisdom, perfect life, and most admirable virtues.

At this time of turmoil in the life of our nation it is very difficult to see clearly the way ahead. I suspect and fear that many of us may never see the world restored back to the relative calm and prosperity of recent years. In our Lenten booklet, Mrs Wyman has this title for this week's readings *Changes on the Horizon*, and yet if we lift our eyes to the horizon it does seem quite bleak, even hidden by the storm raging around us. At first reading the immediate implication of Mrs Wyman's title is that we should expect to see something hopeful coming towards us over the horizon, but in fact all we can see is the chaos wreaked by the coronavirus sweeping through the population of the world and hitting the economies of all nations.

In fact, of course, for Jesus too, in this fifth week of Lent, his horizon was darkened by the imminent events ahead of him in Holy Week. What changes he could see on the horizon were ones that filled him with fear and tested his vocation of loyalty to the call of the Father. Surely compared to our present predicament, his was the darker prospect by far, his was the most hopeless outcome he could imagine. We can despair of our situation, but nothing we may be suffering can be matched to the change he saw ahead of him on the horizon of the next couple of weeks.

Where we seem to be driven by panic at the prospect ahead of us, Jesus, by contrast is quiet, resolved and – most of – humble before the task he was to complete. This enabled him to face the passion with determination and willingness. But this is not some talent that came to him overnight, as it were; his whole life had been a schooling in humility and obedience. Read again that passage of Jeremy Taylor's; pray that the Lord of such humility may by his grace enable us to face the horizon ahead of us with his quiet confidence and equanimity. Maybe our current trials and difficulties will help to shape in us a humility

approaching that of Our Lord's. Maybe the darkness we see as we lift our eyes to the immediate horizon will be but the prelude to the dawn of resurrection as it was for Jesus. Maybe, just maybe, this year our Lenten and Holy Week discipline of living through the isolation and darkness cast over us by the coronavirus will be more telling and constructive for our faith than all the usual liturgies of this season, however well and meaningful we may have presented them.

Fr Chris