



St Marylebone
Parish Church

11.00am Choral Eucharist 4th Sunday before Lent

I think I remember Sir Michael Caine saying on desert island discs that the secret to his long and happy marriage was separate bathrooms and toilets.

When my mother visits I still Hoover and dust.

When my closest friends come for dinner, I still clear up all the paperwork and rubbish that is normally strewn over table, desk and the floor around the desk.

Do we really imagine that our loved ones *don't* know what we look like at our least flattering angle early in the morning? Do I really imagine that my family and friends would be shocked to discover that I *don't* live in a permanent state of page 11 in 'Homes and Gardens' magazine?

We all have our own habits of withholding or concealing from the world, and even from those we love. More often than not they are just vanity or inherited social mores, but they can be deeply corrosive.

The human condition being what it is, on a much deeper level than carpets and toilets, we sometimes find ourselves hiding from that which gives us life. We find ourselves recoiling from God's love and truth, because of our frailty.

In today's Gospel, St Peter once again enters as the fall-guy for the human condition. Once again the Prince of the Apostles gets it all wrong. 'Get away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man'.

In this case the image is boats full of fish, but the key point is universal: in the face of the Lord of life and His abundance, St Peter recoils and rejects. St Peter's words could be shallow theatrics or simple stupidity, but I wonder if it isn't an example of something we all do in little and large ways a lot of the time.

For complex reasons (the blend will be different for each of us) blends of pride, unworthiness, social brain-washing, and especially fear – there are bits of our

lives we won't let God in. 'Get away from me, Lord'. We pretend, or wish, God didn't exist. The bits of our lives we try not to let God in.

My last Bishop, used to joke that the last part of a person to be converted to the Christian faith was his or her wallet! 'Get away from me, Lord'. Like St Peter, still confessing Him as Lord, still acknowledging who He is, but not wanting Him at the moment. Lord, get away from my wallet? Perhaps. Lord, get away from this or that relationship. Lord get away from my infatuation. Lord, get away from my career. Lord, get away from my fears. Lord, get away from my need of this or that. The things we don't want Him around for: it could be ambition, or worries, exploitative behaviours or unhelpful habits. It could be anything.

But, St Peter helps us to see the simple foolishness of keeping our lives in boxes, some of which include God and others of which we hog or hide. It's illogical and it's also not the Gospel life.

Even in a lake that a whole crowd of experienced fishermen had found empty... there is nowhere that Jesus won't bring abundance if we invite Him to be a part of it. To invite Him in to every part is simply to grow into living an integrated Christian life. The alternative is disintegration, in an attempt to be invulnerable. It's what Lord Voldemort did in Harry Potter when he split up his soul and hid them apart as Horcruxes. This dis-integration and compartmentalization has been a tragic reality of lives trapped by drink, or pornography, or ab-use of self and other. But also, in lots of much less dramatic, but also disintegrating and compartmentalising ways. We all have them, in one way or another. The bits we don't like to invite Jesus into.

And it's not a matter of being squeaky clean and *then* letting Jesus in. If HM The Queen were visiting the flat I live in I can tell you you would be able to eat your dinner off my hallway carpet. But this isn't like that at all. It's not that we have to scrub and sort and polish in anticipation of Jesus being in our lives. Instead, He *brings* the light and the healing and cleansing. It's not our scrutiny and scrubbing that makes us God's holy people, it is God's presence in our lives and our attentiveness to it. We are all called to be saints, and every part of our lives is called to the wholeness of a human being fully alive.

St Peter has made our mistake for us. Let us not recoil, but invite. Not feed the instinct to hide, or fear, or panic and scrub, shoving parts of our lives or parts of ourselves under the sofa of life – if you know what I mean; instead, let's grow in the instinct to accept the dawning light. Then Jesus will bring about His abundance in us, in every bit of us, and we will become part of His abundance in the world.