



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Epiphany 4 2019 11.00am Choral Eucharist

The world would be so much *better* if...

If only...?

This Government or *that*.

'Brexit' *this* and 'Brexit' *that*.

'If only people *wouldn't*.' 'If only they *would!*'

If only...

Look at our world: heroes and villains aplenty, and quite a lot in between.

If only... *insert answer here*...it would all be ok.

This strife is not new. The Prophet Isaiah looked upon strife. Our Lord quotes him in today's Gospel. Let's look at these themes – past, present and future.

To frame our thoughts I wish to read from another voice in the wilderness. Brother Carlo Caretto spent half his life working with the poor in C20th European cities, and half as a hermit in the Sahara desert. It's not a short quotation, but his words are worth hearing more than mine!

‘This sand which runs through my fingers is all that remains ...of the civilization which flourished in a Sahara that was once...teeming with life. Some of these civilizations have left a record of themselves, superb, incredibly well preserved inscriptions, evidence of a high degree of development. Now cities and villages alike have disintegrated... The sun and wind of the Sahara have reduced them to sand, mountains of sand... Will the steel of our own technological civilization be able to resist any better? The civilized world of science and culture?...Will they hold out against the forces of time, against the sun and wind? New York, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, Athens, Rome, all will become like these sand dunes...Everything will be reduced to sand, because sand is the symbol of death, and everything must die.

Some people imagine a connection, or better some kind of real continuity between the level of technology and maturity reached by human civilizations and the Kingdom of God. But they are wrong, there is no such continuity. The Kingdom belongs to a different order...Our technology will end up in the sand, just as the first wheel constructed by some gazelle hunter on these same Saharan plains... At this point I can well imagine that some people are worried, even scandalized: ‘What is the good of all our...work? Will anything remain of the earthly city?’ Yes, love will remain. The house will disappear, but the love that held us together will remain... This hope is given us in the Resurrection of Christ.”

Br Carlo’s words are in stark contrast to the ‘only if’ struggles and solutions that face our world.

What light can it shine on Jesus's reading from Isaiah? Perhaps Jesus had come to love Isaiah on his mother's knee. There is a striking similarity between the themes of today's Gospel and St Mary's *Magnificat*: God's justice flooding human society and restoring all things.

These are ancient themes: good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed. Hannah sang of them when her son Samuel was born six centuries before Christ (1 Sam 2). But hundreds of years before Hannah even (in Leviticus) we find the year of jubilee – the 'year of the Lord's favour' Jesus calls it today. Every seventh cycle of seven years, by Jewish law all debts were to be cancelled, all slaves and prisoners freed, all economic and social burdens lifted and reset as a gift of God – justice restored in mercy.

So, we see that these pressing contemporary themes are also ancient. That's the past.

And we see that they are *present*. These 'burning' questions are here and now in the Eucharist. The Eucharist *is* the peace, justice and restoration of heaven breaking through to our here and now. The Eucharist is the banquet of the Kingdom of God. It is creation restored to unity and wholeness, worshiping with one voice; just as we rag-tag bunch join our voices with the angels in singing 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus...AMEN'.

Incomplete as we are now, just for a moment we taste our destiny. Just like Jesus standing in the Synagogue, He is

amongst us now. Then: ancient wisdom. Now: Eucharistic reality and destiny. So to the future, the 'not yet' we taste: 'Thy Kingdom Come'.

The 'Now' and the 'Not Yet' are key to life as a Christian. 'Now' and 'not yet' help us to live in this world with faith, hope and love. It is our calling to 'join the dots' for the world. To point to the ancient wisdom; to show the world what Christ has done and is doing now; and to point with hope to our destiny. Past, present, future. This should cause us to be courageous in hope and audacious in love. Not trapped by the 'If only...'s that encircle us, but with a greater vision: 'This is being fulfilled in [our] hearing', then, now, and not yet.

I shall give the last words to Brother Carlo. What might they mean for us in the light of Jesus' words in the Gospel? As people and a community called *to* the Eucharist and then called to *live it out*. As people who have *hope*?

'The Kingdom belongs to a different order... Our technology will end up in the sand, just as the first wheel constructed by some gazelle hunter on these same Saharan plains... 'What is the good of all our... work? Will anything remain of the earthly city?' Yes, love will remain... This hope is given us in the Resurrection of Christ.'