



5th Sunday after Trinity 2020, 11am Holy Eucharist

Readings:

The Prophecy of Isaiah 55.10-13

The Holy Gospel according to St Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

Today the Lord preaches His own sermon, parable and meaning. I am not going to pretend that I can do a better job than the Word made flesh.

Except there is a weak gag to be found here... now that *is* my territory.

‘Let anyone with ears listen’. Ears of corn, growing from the seeds, we’re the ears of corn, let those with *ears* listen. Get it? Yeah, sorry.

Comedian Frank Skinner (a faithful Christian at Mass every Sunday) said that he regrets that the Gospels don’t have more instances of Christ *laughing*.

Laughter is such an essential part of our humanity.

So **what of the Lord’s sense of humour?** We know that Christ loved to dine with friends. His first miracle is to lavish a wedding party with a veritable cuvee of *great* wine, He orchestrates *dozens* of dinner parties, surely His life was bubbling with humanity, and must have therefore been bubbling with laughter too. *Yes*, is my answer.

Think of those hours spent chatting with the disciples; long, late suppers with prostitutes, tax collectors and fishermen. **The joy of life together is at the heart of The Faith**, it’s been something many of us have especially treasured and especially missed in lockdown – zoom or no zoom. I have had my fair share of clergy gin martini zooms in recent months. An example set by the Lord Himself, well sort of.

But you have more than my say to go on, when it comes to the laughter.

One Jewish scholar suggests Jesus’ apparent humourlessness in the Gospel is because of Isaac thousands of years before...

Isaac means ‘he will laugh’.¹

¹ Guy G. Stroumsa, “Christ’s Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12:3 (2004): 267-288

What we call the *Sacrifice* of Isaac (a prefiguring of Christ's Sacrifice of course), the Jewish tradition calls the *Binding* of Isaac. It's a piece of dramatic irony. He will laugh... when he *isn't* sacrificed by Abraham, only *bound* then *freed*.

The major figures of the Old Testament are lenses to understand the Christ. Jesus is the new Isaac, the new Moses, the successor of David. Key images for understanding who Christ is. Isaac, the Son of the Covenant was key in the early days. So, for Christ to be a man of *laughter* would (to Jews of the Early Church) have associated Christ with Isaac as the one who *didn't* really die, *wasn't* really sacrificed, but was taken down alive and walked away having only *appeared* to have been offered. Dramatic Irony. **Docetism** is the name of the heresy, and it unsurprisingly emerged in those early years. Did He really die? Perhaps He never had a physical body at all (so the extreme Docetists argued)? All sorts of schemes were dreamt up to get around the astonishing truth that the genuinely unique has happened: God became man, He emptied His life, and returned to life abolishing death once and for all.

In 1st Century Judea humour wasn't an *asset* to the propagation of the Gospel but a *threat*. It is an interesting thesis from a Jewish academic, and might go some way to explaining the lack of mother-in-law jokes in the Gospels, but where does it leave *us*?

My College Principal, a monk, used to speak of three tables as the foundation of who we are: **the Altar, the Refectory table, and the study desk.**

It's true of *all* Christian life:

- The place of work (be it slaving over a hot keyboard, a Carpenter's workshop, a nurses' station, a classroom whiteboard) wherever it is.
- The table of hospitality and belonging whether we dine alone with Christ or surrounded by others with Christ.
- And the altar table of the heavenly banquet to which, even on this side of the veil, we are given the Bread of Heaven. Food for our pilgrim journey home.

[https://www.academia.edu/37048407/Guy_G._Stroumsa_Christ_s_Laughter_Docetic_Origins_Reconsidered_Journal_of_Early_Christian_Studies_12_3_2004_267-288]

Think of the three tables in your life...

and ask **how you *recognise* and truly *acknowledge* Christ as the *true host* at each?** How can we together see that which has been true *all along*: that we are guests at the feast of life, and Christ alone is the host, calling us to sit and feast with Him there?