

## ***Today I Put Before You A Blessing Or A Curse***

How good are you at pronouncing curses? I have always been disappointed by the results of my curses. They never seem to have the dramatic effect I would (at the time) wish them to produce. I once cursed the town of Bourg-en-Bresse; having driven to see it for three hours, it refused me anywhere to park my car. After some time I gave up and left, but not without pronouncing a rich, fulsome, satisfying malediction on the place, with all its works and empty promises. And, to my amazement, *nothing happened!* It's still there to this day.

On reflection I have to say that I'm grateful for this. There is no reason why God should carry out instructions which proceed from my personal anger against others. Nevertheless, I have to confess I am often very angry with other people, and the more I hear the news of what goes on around me, the more I am tempted to be angry. Anger is a powerful motive force within the world.

There are many people who seek a position in life where their curses can be carried out to the letter. I'm not just talking about the great Dictators who have sought absolute power over multitudes. They are already in a shooting-gallery, and need no fire from me. Yet there are lowlier relationships within so many homes and schools and places of work, where domination, and the refusal to listen and share, are suffered by large numbers of people. And the same note of intolerance between people has an assured place in our discussion of the issues of the day: law and order, asylum-seekers, international relations. I think a political party which promised to be good at cursing people would get a lot of votes, if only we could agree about who deserves to be cursed.

Today we have listened to a prophetic message about a curse. We may well be surprised at what gets cursed in it. God curses *those who put their trust in man, who rely on things of flesh*. Look around you. God curses the trusting in human ideas, the limiting of our thought to what makes human sense, the concentration on physical realities. In fact, God curses the path of the atheistic humanism which is the default mode of discourse - but not, thankfully, of life - in our world. Those who appeal to any reality higher than humanity, or who uphold values which cut across monetary prudence, can expect to be laughed out of court in our world. Very well: God curses that world. We are not allowed to base our politics on our *beliefs*, which are of strictly private and personal concern. The only sort of proposal our world will accept is one that can be subscribed to by all, whatever their beliefs. Take your dearest belief, your most cherished value. Live by it if you can; but try to express it in a public policy, and we'll accuse you of imposing your values on others, and of "forcing your religion down our throats". If it's going on the statute-books, it must express nothing beyond the lowest common denominator of moral and spiritual opinion.

There is no issue in the world today so clearly crying out for redress as the issue of hunger. The implications are absolutely plain: *the world is sick and dying because of our wealth*. We could easily redress the greater part of this suffering by a quite tolerable modification of our own wealth. Instead, whilst the world starves, we suffer from the diseases of the overfed, and go to our electric-blanketed beds telling ourselves we deserve more wealth than we are getting.

There is no clearer example of our willingness to invest in the things of flesh, or to live in a world that excludes God. We may work hard to create a devotional corner in our lives, to give a place to God in the unfolding of our day; but we are living in a world that can gaze complacently on the malnutrition, injury, and needless deaths

of millions of God's children, preserving our peace of mind by the assumption that we deserve to be rich, and they do not, and that no-one can or should do anything about it.

It is an astounding fact that the Gospel should contain so exact a picture of this situation, in the parable from Luke which we have read tonight. The presence of this parable will be the overwhelming witness against us on the day of Judgment. It has been read in and out of season throughout the history of the Church. We have no excuse for our complacency before the starving millions, before the AIDS pandemic, before the miserable educational famine which keeps the little ones poor today, and blights the prospects for their children tomorrow.

It can be different. There are deeds of hope to be done, and we should lead the world in the outpouring of love to the Lazarus who so scandalously lies outside our gates. His life in this world is indeed under our most effective curse. We must lift it whilst we can, or enter the next world with our own curse upon us.

*Station Mass, Bulwell*

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