

4th Sunday in Easter – Year A 2023

Acts 2:14. 36-41; Psalm 22:1-6; 1st Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

I am sure that you already know that the puritans and modern moral guardians of our age are re-writing famous books such as the James Bond adventures and the children's series by Roald Dahl so that the great British reader's sensibilities will not be exposed or upset by the contents of the past's literary endeavours which were written without regard to the delicate sensitivity that our civilisation has accustomed us to. I am, of course, convinced that this is not censorship but merely ensuring that the classics can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come without being upset. The word 'fat' should not be used because it might coarsen delicate minds, but it is totally appropriate to have explicit and varied sexual texts available to our children in order to foster in them the correct relationship with the people and society around them. I think it is an inspired idea and someone should write a hope filled book about it, and call it 'Brave New Worlds' or '2084' or something along those lines.

On the subject of changing the words in books so that only the 'right' story is told, I was given a book at Christmas called *'The Way of the Gardener'*. There are two reasons why I did not start it until recently. The first is that it has the word 'Gardener' in it, which does not interest me. The second is that was given to me by my mother, which means it was supposed to be an improving

book. Despite these major obstacles I have begun it. In the book, which is about a pilgrimage along Camino De Santiago, the author muses about fig trees and remembers the Biblical story of Jesus cursing the fig tree that has no fruit. He shares his remembrance of this story from Matthew's Gospel with a fellow pilgrim, who is apparently Catholic. Her response was to insist that Jesus would not have done that. "Cursing a tree, she said, 'just wasn't in his nature.'"¹ My first reaction was incredulity that 2000 years after the event, someone would claim to know the truth of the event, and the truth of Jesus, more than the person who witnessed it and had lived with Jesus. It struck me that this was another kind of censorship, but much more serious than trying to re-write 'Maltilda' and remove reference to witches. The lady was trying to re-write history and she was trying to rewrite Divine Revelation to make it fit into her image of what Jesus should be like. If you don't like it, rewrite it, say you know better, or simply rub it out. This is comfort faith.

I suppose it is because of this mentality that I am upset about the 'Synodal process.' It has been globally taken up as an opportunity to re-mould the church into the shape of the world. The word 'Repentance' has been removed and the word 'Inclusive' has been substituted. The image of the 'narrow path' has been replaced by the 'enlarged tent'. Jesus, at least the Jesus of the Gospels, is absent. What Jesus has been replaced with is a smug reflection of the spirit of the Age and its Gospel. In this new Gospel of the Age, the fig tree that bears no fruit to nourish Jesus is embraced by Jesus because it

¹ Penner, Lyndon. *The Way of the Gardener*. p. 27.

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is a tree and Jesus is a man. For my questioning of this type of theology I was told not so long ago that I was out of step with what people want to hear and what people think. I knew that, but it was nice to have it validated by an external source other than God. But not all people. Those who have ears will hear.

This Sunday is often referred to as ‘Good Shepherd Sunday’, because of the Gospel story and because priests often speak about, and encourage, vocations. With a distinct thinness of vocations to the priesthood this is understandable. But first, we the Holy Church, the Bride of Christ, need to return to an understanding of holiness which flows from Revelation, and is built on an understanding of holiness which is not of our own making. If we find Holy Scripture difficult, we should study it. If we don’t understand the reasons behind the teachings of the Church we should read them and about them. If we find them difficult to live out maybe we need to change, and not Scripture or the teachings of the Church. Maybe we need to *repent*. If we did this then I suspect that our call to holiness would be clearer and easier and vocations more easily found and fostered. Maybe Jesus was on to something when he spoke of himself as the gate by which we need to enter and all others are thieves and brigands. We should go through the gate. Yes, I think that will work.

Our Lady, Queen of the Clergy, Pray for us.