

Ordinary Time Year A Week 4 2023

Zeph 2:3; Ps 145; Cor 1:26; Matt 5:1-12

A few weeks ago I mentioned that I would start preparing us for Lent soon. It seems good to lay out the ground-work for where we are being called to.

I begin with a quote from an interview with a gentleman named Adam Smith-Connor:

“22 years ago I drove my ex-girlfriend to a facility and paid for her to have an abortion. It was a pivotal moment in my life. The consequences of my actions that day came back to grieve me years later, when I realized I had lost my son Jacob to an abortion I had paid for. Recently, I stood outside a similar facility and prayed to God for my son Jacob, for other babies who have lost their lives to abortion, for their grieving families, and for abortion clinic staff.”

The consequences for Adam Smith-Connor for that act of silent prayer early last week (19th January) was that he was issued with a £100 penalty fine because Bournemouth council had prohibited all acts of prayer within the area he was in.¹

Also in the news was the Church of England’s Bishops’ decision that, while they would not condone same sex weddings, they would allow same sex blessings. There is no doubt in my mind that in this conclave of the high and mighty of the Established Church there is a feeling that they have reached a good compromise. The world tells them that they should allow same sex relationships and so they have inched towards it, hoping that few people notice that they have

¹ Accessed 25 Jan, 2023 https://adf.uk/army-vet-fined-for-praying/?mkt_tok=OTA3LU9EWS0wNTEAAAGJfSpxDyA1Cnd9MPEmgLs4sURJSpEQn96yjqGvLc8Sd3hWMvce8JkFKHD84_g5un8095QP5A3harl7kPLcHNxCrOhn_HiRYreOBMI1lzqHfBI-JxPdQ

² One such commentator wrote ‘*Are we seriously supposed to believe that a divine Creator would deliberately make humans shoes essential nature was repulsive to Him*’. She seems

moved away from divine law and are more concerned with temporal popularity. Maybe some in the Church of England will remember that you cannot bless what is sinful, nor can the world define what is sin for the faithful. I hope so, but meanwhile the shepherds have deserted the flock.

I know little about Adam Smith-Connor’s faith, but I do know that in his prayer from the heart for his aborted baby boy he is closer to the heart of Jesus than all the Right Reverends. The emotionally charged words about, ‘kindness’, ‘hurt feelings’ and ‘love’ that those who support gay marriage and relationships like to use forget about the call to holiness, calling us out of sin – including those things which are deeply entrenched in us – and, back to God.²

This brings us to how we are called to God. I would like to suggest that we are called to walk along ‘the path of incense.’ I am sure that you are aware that I have increased the use of incense at Mass. Some may object, saying it is unnecessary or old-fashioned or optional.

In our Lord’s time incense was used in the temple as a sign of God’s presence. Frankincense was a sign of God and priest-hood, and burned in the temple in Jerusalem. It is at the time of incense that Zechariah goes into the tent with the Holy of Holies and is told by an angel that his wife will conceive a son and his name is to be ‘John’. Myrrh is an ancient sign of suffering and death and I add it to the Frankincense during Lent and at funerals.

to have forgotten that we have made our nature repulsive from our own wrongdoing. It is called sin and includes sexual sin, which I realise it not as bad as holding the wrong opinion, but does seem to have a deep hold on society.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/columnists/2023/01/25/church-england-would> Telegraph, Allison Pearson, 25 Jan, 2023. Accessed 25 Jan 2023

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Frankincense and Myrrh were given to the infant Jesus by the magi, which we celebrate at the Epiphany. I burn Frankincense at the altar because God is present. I am incensed because Christ is present in my actions. You are incensed because Christ is present in you. Christ is present in the Holy Gospel when it is proclaimed, and so we use incense. Christ is the Holy of Holies and our High Priest so we use incense. When the bread and wine are consecrated on the altar and become the Body and Blood of Jesus we use incense.

Incense points our eyes and our noses, and therefore our souls, to something that is very necessary for our salvation: Christ. Earlier in the week a lady came into the church during the week at Ashby and she said to me: *'I smell incense. Churches should always smell of incense.'* She was right, Churches should smell of incense because it is the smell of Christ, of sacrifice.

As we begin to orientate ourselves towards Lent we should all be thinking, 'What will I offer this Lent?' Well, we know that we are guided by the holy practices of Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting. We are to put aside our lusts and our worldly appetites, we are not to conform to the world, but to Christ. We are to turn aside from sin. We are to cry to heaven from broken hearts. We are to be guided down the road of incense.

You know the saying 'a shepherd should smell of his sheep'. This means that he needs to get amongst his people and live with them, and that this is a sign of Christ amongst us. It is true, but it is conversely true that we, the sheep, are to smell of the shepherd. And, if we have taken Lent seriously, by Easter we should smell of incense because we smell of Christ. Incense, it turns out, is ancient but not really optional at all. We should start walking.