

THURSDAY

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First Things

Fr David



Fragments of All Souls

Autumn is a struggle between summer's warmth (which, frankly, we don't see much of in England!) and winter's chill (need I say any more?). We experience, if we're lucky, a few beautiful autumn days, and we are able to enjoy a few late flowers blooming in the beds of people's front gardens.

The calendar of the Church's year follows closely the cycle of nature's seasons, and for that calendar, too, Autumn is a season of contrasts.

There is, of course, the great Festival of All Saints - that celebration of the glorious harvest of the spirit, of sanctity matured and gathered in, stored up and treasured in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a glorious festival of joy, and peace, and life fulfilled - the golden days of autumn, a festival all white and gold.

But then, the very next day, the livery of the church is changed to black, for the Observance of All Souls and mass is said for all the faithful souls departed. It is as though we were observing the last little gleaming of spiritual harvest, the fragments remaining from the Feast.

But the tone of the ancient mass of requiem is far from

cheerful, “*Dies irae, dies illa,*” says the 13th century sequence hymn by Thomas of Celano -

*“Day of wrath and doom impending
David’s word with Sibyl’s blending
Heaven and earth in ashes ending.”*

In contrast with current fashions in Christian piety, the ancient mass of requiem seems to imply that we are not quite all saints, and that getting to be saints may be a painful and difficult business: a narrow gate, a long road, and judgement at the end of it.

Sanctity is a problem. As we learned from the All Saints’ Day gospel lesson, it means pure of heart: “Blessed are the pure in hearts,” says Jesus, “For they shall see God”. That is to say, to be a saint is to will in all things only the pure and simple and perfect good, which is God: to love God with all the heart, and all the soul, and all the mind, and with all the strength, and in the perspective of that love, to love one’s neighbour as oneself. That is purity of heart: as Kierkegaard puts it, in the title of one of his books, “Purity of heart is to will one thing”. To will one thing - only pure and simple and perfect good. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Blessed are they whose loves are all united in the one love of God. As Boethius (who we will read in our Foundation Year!) says, in the *Consolation*:

*O happy race of men
If the love that rules the stars
May also rule your hearts.*

And the ancient pagan Aristotle, and the medieval Christian

Dante (both of whom we will read!) would say the same.

But who then is pure of heart? Our wills, our loves, are certainly far from simple. We “will” so many things; so many “goods”, so many “bads”, and we get so confused about them; and, as S Paul says, *even the good that we would do, we do not, and the evil that we would not do is precisely what we do.* Our goodness is very limited, and like the late autumn flowers, it’s really pretty fragile.

Fragments of sanctity - crumbs of sanctity. The goodness of our works will never save us. But what do we read in the Gospel: “Gather up the fragments...that nothing be lost.” God will not despise our fragments, which go towards making up the twelve baskets of his new Israel. When we speak of the “faithful departed”, we mean those whose final choice, even if only in the final moment of all life’s choosings, is for the good; and we trust God’s mercy to make of that fragment something more - to purify the heart, that no fragment be lost, that the harvest be complete.

We pray for the departed, as we pray for one another here and now. We do not cease to be our brothers’ keepers when we commend them to God’s keeping, and we plead Christ’s sacrifice for them and for ourselves. The prayer is essentially the same: that God, who works in them and us, will save and nurture and bring to fruition our little fragments of spiritual life, that we may come at last to the peace of the saints, the purity of heart which wills one thing.



^{The} Churchwarden's Chest

News & Up-dates

Sue Mott



Welcome to this edition of the newly formatted Parish Magazine. The intention is to include a bit more news and fewer less formidable articles of instruction. For those of us who have enjoyed the essays on faith but may just have found a weekly diet of rarefied piety difficult to digest a few lower level offerings are now being served on a monthly basis.

It has been wonderful to welcome so many of our regular congregation back into church since we were allowed to re-open in July. Of course the interior has some temporary

alterations and it is certainly an alien environment, but we are following the national guidelines and have made the church as safe to visit as we can. I realise it is not possible for everyone who wishes to return to come into church just yet and you are all very much in our thoughts at this most difficult time. I would like to take this opportunity to remind those who do come to services on Sunday and Wednesday that we still need to observe the protocols introduced back in July have having minor alterations as government advice develops.

We ask that you continue to wear a face covering, masks and visors are available in church if you do not have one. Use the hand gel on the way in and out and follow the directions for entering and leaving. Everyone who comes needs to leave us their name and contact details as we are part of the track and trace network. At each designated seat is a Mass Book, bottle of hand gel and Sunday Mass Sheet. Please take the Mass Sheet home with you and do remember to sanitise your hands before and after receiving communion.

The church has to be ventilated during services which are reduced in length to comply with the current rules. We will be able to put the heating on but we will still need to ventilate the building during services so do please wear appropriate clothing. Bring a rug for your knees if needed! The Car Park is open again for Sunday worship so those who do not have mobility issues please use the car park and leave Church Street for those less able to get about.

There is a container for you to put your weekly offerings and your Lent Box if you are able to return this. At the end of each service we are instructed to clear the building as quickly as possible but we can meet in Church Street, however, I must

remind everyone that we need to maintain the 2m distance and observe the Rule of Six while chatting. It is essential for us all that we do not become a source of transmission of the virus due to individual negligence.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the current guidelines do please be in touch with Father Harris or one of the Church Officers.

Dates for your Diary

(Any changes to our current pattern will be made if the guidelines change)

APCM on Zoom Saturday 31st October 10.30am – see Father David's email of 3rd October for full details.

Sundays in November are far from being Ordinary:

Sunday 1st November - All Saints Day, Parish Mass 10.30am

Sunday 8th November – Remembrance Sunday, Parish Mass 10.30am

Sunday 15th November – Feast of the Reading Martyrs, Parish Mass 10.30am

Sunday 22nd November – Christ the King, Parish Mass 10.30am

Sunday 29th November – Advent I, Parish Mass 10.30am

A Mass for All Souls' will be celebrated on Wednesday 4th November at 10.30am at the Nave altar. Details to follow but the numbers able to attend will be the same as for Sundays. Please do book your seats via the website.

Churchwarden's Archives

As some of you will recall there used to be a monthly magazine called Parish News which was eagerly awaited in those pre-internet days. Some of the earlier articles I have written and shared with you were based on events or items taken from old copies of the Parish News. This month I am sharing an article from the June 1975 edition. There were also lists and rotas and I wonder if Mr and Mrs Vernon (Joyce and Keith) recall taking up the Elements on the 22nd June 1975!

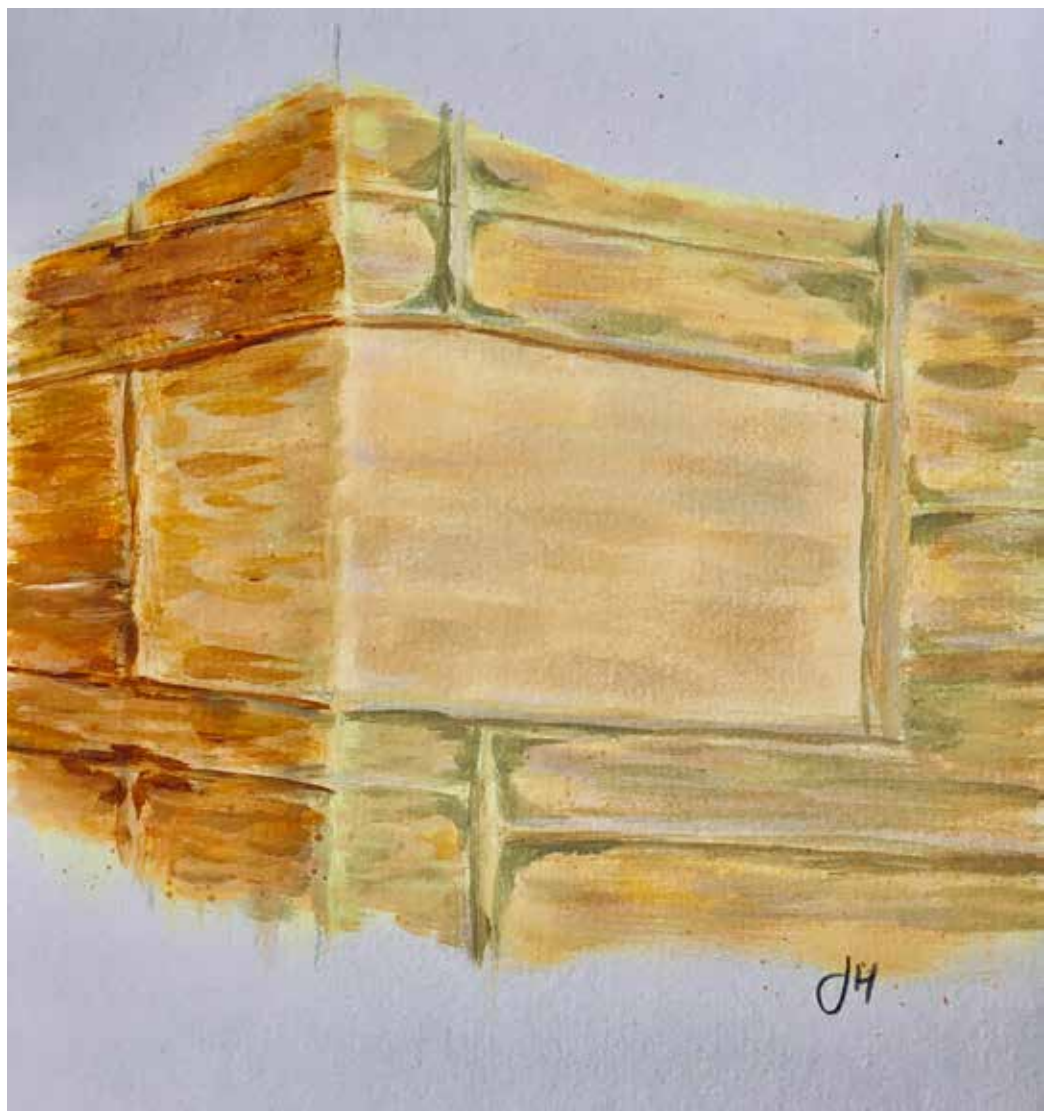
The article entitled SCRIPTURE CAKE caught my eye, submitted by Mrs Dowding who I remember was one of the group of dedicated Parish News sellers who delivered it to local houses.

So if you are feeling in need of spiritual sustenance do try out the recipe, which needs a little research! If you find all the ingredients do send a copy to me, if you try out the cake, good luck. A cupful is around 4oz or 115g.

4.5 Cupfuls of 1st Kings iv.22.	1.5 Cupfuls of Judges v.25.
2 Cupfuls of Jeremiah vi.20	2 Cupfuls of Nahum iii. 12.
1 Cupful of Numbers xvii.25	2 tbsp of 1st Samuel xiv.25
6 Articles of Jeremiah xvii.11	A pinch of Leviticus ii.13

Season to taste with 2nd Chronicles ix.9 Add citron and follow Solomon's advice to making a good boy.....Proverbs xxiii.14 and you'll have a good cake.

Bon Appetit!



Expositio Lectionis Dominicae



On some Sunday's lessons

Fr Tomas

The Two Sons

The scriptural passage, which is unique to Matthew's Gospel, brings us back to the vineyard, following up on earlier stories about the people who are part of God's kingdom. We are reminded that words are often plentiful and it is easy to make a promise. However, keeping a promise is an entirely different matter, as the parable of the two sons in Matthew's Gospel makes abundantly clear.

It tells us about two boys whose father tells them to go work in his vineyard. The first boy indeed was the one who did his father's will. With his lips he may have denied what he had been told, but what counted was what he actually did. The second son was the opposite: his lips indicated obedience, yet his actions did not. The younger son perhaps shouldn't have said no to the father verbally but he had a change of heart. And his actions revealed that change of heart which counts in the end.

Some people struggle to make a commitment in the first place, but once they do, they muster the discipline and enthusiasm to honour it. Others seem to have less trouble coming to a decision, but then have trouble following through. Many of us fall somewhere in

between. In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel insists that we are each responsible for our actions before God. Each of us must ask ourselves, do we seek to sidestep the blame and place it on circumstances or others when the choice is plainly our own.

Our God is, first of all, a loving God who is both merciful and just. And he demands that the people he has created free also be honest with themselves and accept responsibility for the answer they freely choose to give to his call.

To all of us imperfect disciples, Jesus addresses the question, “Which of you is doing the will of the Father?”

The answer seems to be clear: the one who actually worked, though initially refusing to do so. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who boasted of their faithfulness to God’s teaching, but their commitment was often mere words. They were like the boy who said “I will go” and then did not.

There is a clear link between this parable and the earlier teaching about hearing and doing in Matthew 7:21ff. In Mt 21:30 the second boy responds, “Certainly, sir” (*kyrie* means “sir” or “lord”) which is the same expression used in Mt 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ (*Kyrie, Kyrie*)...” The notion of Jesus’s authority is also a theme that links the two passages. In 7:21ff, the teaching about the importance of following up verbal obedience with

actions is embodied in the parable of the two houses (Mt 7:24-27). The conclusion of that parable says, “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

Indeed, the scribes in the audience were very surprised to hear that tax collectors and prostitutes were going into the kingdom of God ahead of them. What made the tax collectors and harlots different than the chief priests was their reaction to the teaching of John the Baptist. Although they were sinners they paid heed and, following their conversion, they became followers of the “way of righteousness.” The point is that the religious leaders who should most exemplify uprightness did not believe, while those who were thought to be unrighteous believed and so entered God’s kingdom.

Our God is, first of all, a loving God who is both merciful and just. And he demands that the people he has created free also be honest with themselves and accept responsibility for the answer they freely choose to give to his call.

We should never forget that God’s Word is greater than any human word. His Word is so substantial that it is a divine Person, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. And this Word is not satisfied with plain promises. This Word, Jesus Christ, went beyond anything he promised in terms of words, he lived his life for others and for others he also sacrificed it. As we read in the second reading, he stripped himself of glory, assumed the form of a slave, even to accepting death on the Cross. The last and ultimate word of the living Word was the Resurrection, the most eloquent promise Our Lord ever made – and which he has truly fulfilled.

In this engraving, the Sun Inn is dwarfed by the Episcopal Chapel next door.



John Dearing



WAR AND WAR'S ALARMS

As the largest town in Berkshire Reading must have been a natural recruiting ground for the country's armed forces down the centuries. When John Howard visited the old Reading County Gaol in Castle Street, he found no fewer than 19 men who had been pressed into the Royal Navy, outnumbering by one the more normal population of felons and debtors. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Sun Inn next door also played its part in keeping the forces of the King supplied with fighting men.

This was especially the case during the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815). Fortunately at this time of national crisis it was not always necessary to employ the somewhat dubious methods used by the press gangs; subtle persuasion could be just as effective. Around 1807 the Sun was the scene of a recruitment drive by Lord Paget's Hussars, whose recruitment poster read as follows:

The Honors and Comforts attached to the life of a Hussar are innumerable; he has everything that he can possibly wish for found him, without any trouble to himself. He is comfortably and most handsomely clothed and mounted on the finest Blood Horses England can produce, and has the pleasure of dining every day upon all the luxuries of the Season, with a set of the jolliest Fellows in the World.

**Fine Fellows of good Character, who wish to make their Fortune, may receive
A LARGE BOUNTY**

**Enter immediately into free Quarters and liberal Pay, and be treated at all times as gentlemen,
By Applying to Captain Duckinfield
Or Serjeant Hough, at the Sign of the Sun, Reading.
God Save the King**

N.B. The Hussars are not allowed to ride their Horses hunting more than once a Week, except when in the Neighbourhood of His Majesty's Stag Hounds.

No mention here of going off to fight Boney in the Peninsular War: the author would undoubtedly have had a promising career with Saatchi and Saatchi, had he been born two hundred years later!

The poster has been dated fairly accurately to 1807, since this was the year that the former 7th Light Dragoons were renamed the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars. Captain Duckinfield, named in the poster, had been commissioned Cornet (2nd Lieutenant) on 8 October 1801, rising to Lieutenant on 2 June 1806 and Captain on 20 November 1806. The regiment subsequently took part in the Coruna campaign under Sir John Moore, whose death inspired the best-known war poem of this period, *The Burial of Sir John Moore at Coruna* by Charles Wolfe. Sadly it is recorded that



***General Lord Henry Paget at the
Battle of Benavente in 1808***

Captain Duckinfield drowned in 1809 when the troop transport *Despatch* sank off the Lizard in Cornwall. Perhaps too some of the fine fellows recruited at the *Sun* went to Davy Jones' Locker with him.

It is quite likely that the *Sun* was also used during the Napoleonic Wars as a billet for troops.

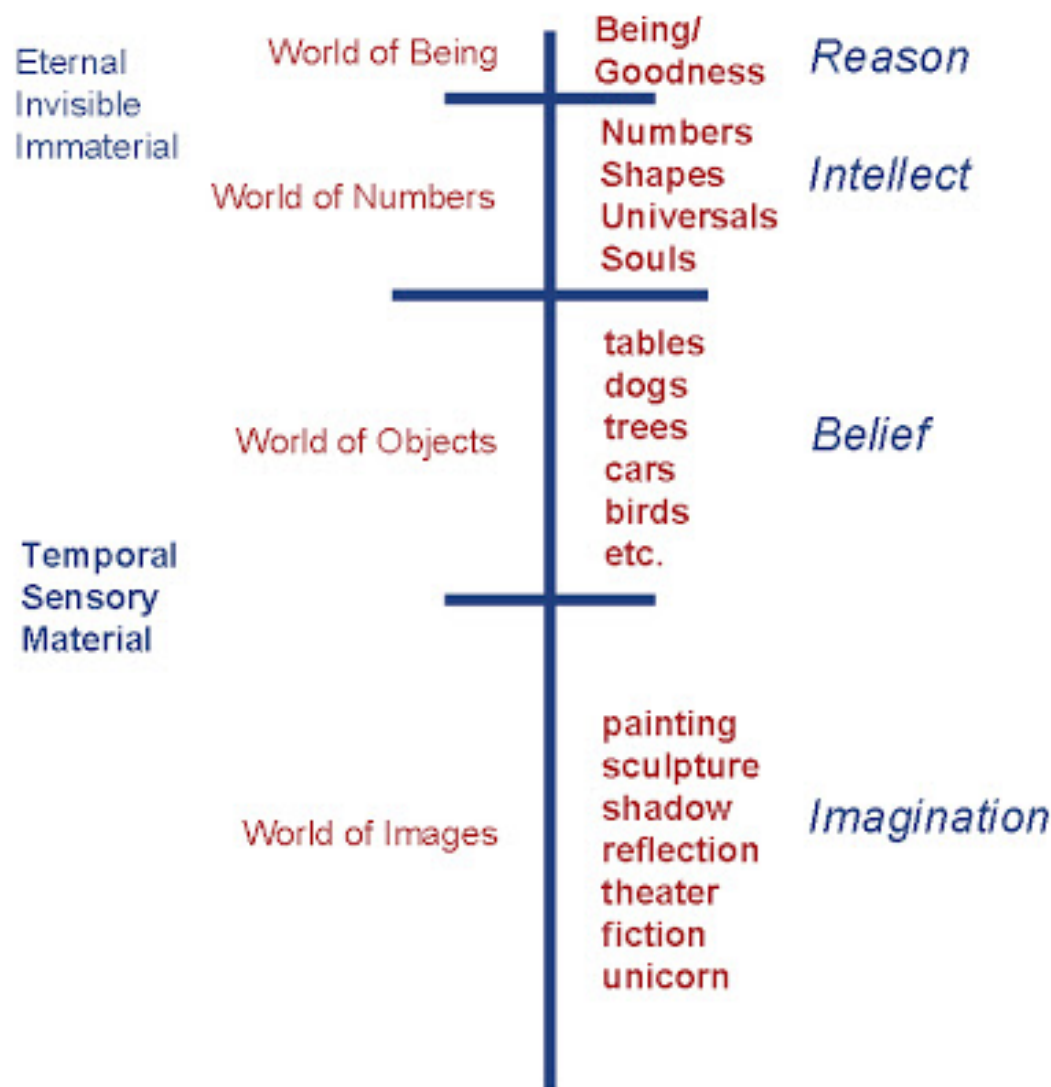
On 27 May 1799, we find the *Reading Mercury* reporting that:

By the act lately passed for increasing the rates of subsistence to be paid to Innkeepers and others, for quartering of soldiers, the non-commissioned officers and soldiers are to pay 10d a day for diet, and small beer in quarters; and for articles which have hitherto furnished gratis, in lieu thereof, the Innkeepers etc. are to be allowed 2d per day. For horses quartered on them, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d a day is to be paid for hay and straw.

The *Mercury* reported on 3 May 1800 on a bill being discussed in House of Commons Committee 'to give relief to Innkeepers billeting soldiers.' Mr William Windham, who then held the office of Secretary for War under William Pitt, had 'suggested that in cases where the subsistence already paid amounted to seven pence halfpenny, his intention was to raise it to three-pence, and make it ten-pence halfpenny; and where they at present received ten-pence to raise it six-pence, and make it one shilling and four-pence. Resolutions to this effect were carried, together with one imposing a penalty on Innkeepers refusing to receive such subsistence money.'

The Divided Line

A Picture of Plato's Ontology



URBAN ABBEY

*Some reflections on the
books we've been reading.*

Lucy Stothard



Forms and Embodiment

In Plato's Republic

The hypothetical regime constructed by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* may present difficulties to the modern Western reader, who is likely to come from a society in which personal freedom is cherished, individualism is relatively unrestrained and the acquisition of private property is held as a non-negotiable right. Socrates' descriptions of the role of medical care in his aristocracy may be particularly problematic; one could be forgiven, upon encountering the proscription of medical treatment for those with chronic health conditions, for thinking that Plato held human life to have little to no inherent value (406b-408b).

But would such an accusation fair, or would it risk missing the point of the text? When navigating the vast and complex waters of *Republic*, it is necessary to hold as a compass its author's ultimate goal: establishing the rightful place of justice in the life of a human being. In the latter half of the text, Plato employs two key metaphors in his attempt to answer the question of whether or not justice is a good

thing and what, if any, benefits it holds for the human soul. These are, respectively, the cave of ignorance from which human beings are invited to ascend, and the quadripartite line representing the upward journey from conjecture to understanding.

Forms such as justice, goodness and truth invite humans to embody them - to make them incarnate and sensible in how we live our lives.

his head back and gazing at decorations on a ceiling, and that'd be enough for you to count it as seeing in thought and not with the eyes...but I can't think of any field of study as making a soul look upwards unless it is about what is, and what the eyes don't see."
(529b-c)

However, conceptualising the journey in spatial up-down terms can be misleading, as Glaucon discovers when praising astronomy as a subject which invites its students to "look upwards". Socrates' rebuke is telling:

"From what you're saying, someone would only have to try to learn something by bending

The takeaway point, then, is clear: spatial metaphors can only take the philosopher so far in his or her search for the forms (or essences) of truth, good and justice. Inevitably there comes a point at which the metaphor collapses and can take us no further; it may even hinder us if we fall into the trap of thinking that the forms exist somewhere "up there". When dealing with forms, we are in the realm of the intelligible, not the sensible. This means

that any attempt to locate a form or conceptualise it in spatial or temporal terms cannot but fail; doing so involves falling back on the sensible, confining us to the second segment of the line described in Book VI: the realm of thoughtfulness inhabited by geometricians. (510c-511a; 511d).

But while the text insists that forms can only be comprehended in the abstract, Socrates himself constantly falls back on sensible, spatial language when discussing them: the text contains numerous references to “turning”, “looking”, “moving toward” and “seeing” (517c; 519b; 521c-d). We therefore encounter somewhat of a tension: forms cannot be comprehended in sensible terms, yet human beings, as sensory creatures, naturally gravitate toward that which we can perceive with our senses. Even when something is by its nature intelligible, we naturally seek to bring it into the realm of the sensible.

Perhaps this is precisely the point: that forms such as justice, goodness and truth invite humans to *embody* them - to make them incarnate and sensible in how we live our lives and structure our societies. As animals with both sensible and intelligible faculties, we are the only living things capable of doing so in the fullest sense. Justice can neither be seen nor comprehended with the senses, yet it can become incarnate in the perfectly just human being (587b). When considering Plato’s attitude toward humanity, then, a surface reading of *Republic* is inadequate. By understanding justice, truth and goodness as forms which, while incapable of being understood in physical terms, nevertheless invite embodiment, the text sheds light on what it means to be human and, by proxy, the inherent value of human life.

The Guest bit

Hans Boersma

The Vice of Curiosity

This year's lectionary readings for the matriculation service at the seminary where I teach were rather curious. They were from Psalm 90 ("You return man to dust and say, 'Return, O children of man!'"), Ecclesiastes 1 ("Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity"), and Luke 9 ("Herod said, 'John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he sought to see him"). For encouragement at the outset of the seminarians' studies, one would think almost any other passage might have done better than these.

There's no denying the sobering character of these Scripture readings. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes, in particular, seems determined to undermine even the most committed novice: All of our work is hevel, vanity; it's a puff of wind, fragile, empty, insubstantial. The academic curriculum is crammed with books—words upon words. And the Preacher reminds us, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (12:12).

Why does the Preacher claim it is a wearisome thing to devote ourselves to our studies? Because no matter how much knowledge we cram into our brains, they never fill

Herod gives curiosity free rein. His perplexity endures to the end, when Pilate sends Jesus off to Herod. We read in chapter 23, “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.”

up: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (1:8). Our eyes turn page after page, our ears take in lecture upon lecture; yet satisfaction escapes us. In the end, it is all more of the same—been there, done that. “Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’?” (1:10). The Preacher seems to undermine his students’ insatiable appetite for knowledge.

Ecclésiastes questions one of our most dearly held cultural assumptions: that curiosity is a good thing. Curiosity is a vice, not a virtue. 1 John 2:16 speaks of three kinds of worldly love: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Saint Augustine, in

his Confessions, identifies the second of these, the lust of the eyes, as curiosity. Why? Because seeing and knowing are one and the same. The African bishop laments our “lust for experimenting and knowing.” “To satisfy this diseased craving,” he comments,

outrageous sights are staged in public shows. The same motive is at work when people study the operations of nature which lie beyond our grasp, when there is no advantage in knowing and the investigators simply desire knowledge for its own sake. . . . Even in religion itself the motive is seen when God is “tempted” by demands for “signs and wonders” (John 4:48) desired not for any salvific end but only for the thrill (Conf. 10.35.55).

“Even in religion,” says Augustine. Even theological studies are not immune to the vice of curiosity.

King Herod, in Luke 9, raises an excellent question: “Who is he?” This is the first and foremost question for every theology student. It is not the question itself that’s the problem, it is the curiosity with which Herod raises it. This should hardly surprise us. Herod, after all, was not a particularly virtuous person: He lived with Herodias, his brother’s wife, and when John the Baptist dared raise a question about it, the king served his head on a platter. Herod was driven more by vice than by virtue.

Still, he engages in theological inquiry. People are speculating about who Jesus is. Herod, we read, is “perplexed” by the question (Luke 9:7). Could John have risen from the dead? Could this be Elijah? Or could one of the prophets of old have arisen? No matter how wicked a person, Herod remains a

theology student. He wants to know who Jesus is, and so he seeks to see him (9:9).

Herod gives curiosity free rein. His perplexity endures to the end, when Pilate sends Jesus off to Herod. We read in chapter 23, “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him” (23:8).

Herod’s desire is to see Jesus. Sadly, he is merely curious. He has fallen into the empirical trap of the “lust of the eyes.” His hope of seeing a sign done by Jesus cannot but remind us of Augustine’s claim that even in religion itself curiosity shows up when we seek knowledge for its own sake as we look for “signs and wonders” only for the thrill. Herod sees Jesus, and yet he still treats him with contempt, mocks him, and arrays him in gorgeous apparel (Luke 23:11). Herod’s question, “Who is this?” stems from curiosity. He is not a genuine student.

Jesus takes up the Herodian question. “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (9:18), he asks his disciples. They respond with the various options mentioned earlier—John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of old. “But who do you say that I am?” Always eager, with his hand up first, Peter responds: “The Christ of God” (9:20). Both Herod and Peter may have matriculated. But only Peter knows how to tackle the question.

Let’s return to the Preacher’s question: “Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? The question may seem rhetorical. No, would be the obvious answer. There is nothing new under the sun. A resigned weariness in studying and

working would seem inevitable.

And yet the Book of Lamentations holds out the gospel, in the midst of Jerusalem's ruins: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23). The Prophet Isaiah holds out the gospel, promising an end to all

Outrageous sights are staged in public shows. . . Even in religion itself the motive is seen when God is "tempted" by demands for "signs and wonders" desired not for any salvific end but only for the thrill.

- *S Augustine*

exile: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa. 43:19). John the Seer holds out the gospel when he sees "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

There is a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new." The new thing is the gospel. The new thing is Jesus, the Christ of God. The new thing is the Spirit

of Pentecost. The new thing is the church. The new thing is the kingdom of God. Indeed, the entire curriculum of the new covenant is packed with new things.

Immediately before discussing the vice of curiosity in the *Summa Theologiae*, Saint Thomas Aquinas deals with the topic of studiousness (ST II-II, q. 166). He treats curiosity as a vice but regards studiousness as a virtue. In other words, it is not knowledge per se, but the immoderate or otherwise wrongful pursuit of knowledge that is the problem. Borrowing the language of Ecclesiastes: Recognition of the gospel as new distinguishes studiousness from curiosity.

Vigilance is required for those wishing to be students of new things, for Herod's approach is easier than Peter's and curiosity easier than studiousness. Curiosity is the lustful pursuit of the pleasures of the eyes; studiousness the sacrificial pursuit of things that are unseen (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18). Both Herod's and Peter's approaches to knowledge are open to students of Jesus. We are called daily to engage in the fight against curiosity as we explore ever more deeply the one question that truly matters: "Who do you say that I am?"

Hans Boersma is the Saint Benedict Servants of Christ Professor in Ascetical Theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary.