

Lent VI (2 April 2023)

“Hosanna to the Son of David: blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord... Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”

+In the Name...

As the organist and I planned the services for Holy Week, we noticed that the pew missalette seems to imply that there is no sermon today. At least, all the other missalettes include “Sermon” when its time comes in the service, whereas Palm Sunday does not. I fear I feel I have not done my duty if I do not give you something to think about while you cook the roast this afternoon, but I promise to keep it short.

The flower guild decided to do something new: Because of the celebratory nature of the beginning of Palm Sunday, including the use of red as a liturgical color in some parishes, the group decided to decorate the church with anemones. When they arrived on Saturday afternoon, they found that the Rector and Sexton had already put out the traditional décor of palm branches. The flower guild was contemplating their options when the Rector walked into

the Church. He was still deciding whether or not to write a sermon for Palm Sunday. After quickly noticing the lovely flowers brought in by the Flower Guild, he waved his arm around the church and asked, “With fronds like these, who needs anemones?” [Groan...]

When I was in seminary, my homiletics professor was well past retirement age. At least, we all thought he was. On our first day of his class, he told us, “I am going to teach you how to preach ‘real’ sermons, not those ‘sermonettes’ used by the Episcopal Church of the 1950s consisting of nothing more than a joke, a story, and a poem!” I was in my early 30s at the time, and was the fourth oldest in our class of ten. None of us had been alive in the 1950s, much less been old enough to remember what sort of sermons were common then. I asked my father, who was an Episcopalian in the 1950s. He remembered that jokes were few and far between in the sermons at his childhood parish.

So much for the joke and the story, on to the poem: Many thanks to our resident Anglophile Alastair for introducing me to John Betjeman, former Poet Laureate of the Realm, this week. Otherwise, there is no telling to whom you

might have been subjected! And so I submit “Diary of a Church Mouse” for your consideration:

“Here among long-discarded cassocks,

Damp stools, and half-split open hassocks,

Here where the vicar never looks

I nibble through old service books.

Lean and alone I spend my days

Behind this Church of England baize.

I share my dark forgotten room

With two oil-lamps and half a broom.

The cleaner never bothers me,

So here I eat my frugal tea.

My bread is sawdust mixed with straw;

My jam is polish for the floor.

Christmas and Easter may be feasts

For congregations and for priests,

And so may Whitsun. All the same,

They do not fill my meagre frame.

For me the only feast at all

Is Autumn's Harvest Festival,

When I can satisfy my want

With ears of corn around the font.

I climb the eagle's brazen head

To burrow through a loaf of bread.

I scramble up the pulpit stair

And gnaw the marrows hanging there.

It is enjoyable to taste

These items ere they go to waste,

But how annoying when one finds

That other mice with pagan minds

Come into church my food to share

Who have no proper business there.

Two field mice who have no desire

To be baptized, invade the choir.

A large and most unfriendly rat
Comes in to see what we are at.
He says he thinks there is no God
And yet he comes ... it's rather odd.
This year he stole a sheaf of wheat
(It screened our special preacher's seat),
And prosperous mice from fields away
Come in to hear our organ play,
And under cover of its notes
Ate through the altar's sheaf of oats.
A Low Church mouse, who thinks that I
Am too papistical, and High,
Yet somehow doesn't think it wrong
To munch through Harvest Evensong,
While I, who starve the whole year through,
Must share my food with rodents who
Except at this time of the year

Not once inside the church appear.
Within the human world I know
Such goings-on could not be so,
For human beings only do
What their religion tells them to.
They read the Bible every day
And always, night and morning, pray,
And just like me, the good church mouse,
Worship each week in God's own house,
But all the same it's strange to me
How very full the church can be
With people I don't see at all
Except at Harvest Festival."

I know some of you had to learn the Prayer Book Catechism in Sunday school or confirmation class. The answer to the question, "What is thy duty towards God?" reads, in part, "My duty towards God is to believe in him, to fear him, And to love him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul,

and with all my strength: To worship him, to give him thanks...To honor his holy Name and his Word...”

As Anglo-Catholic Christians, we have the privilege of a full Holy Week: services every day, which tell the story of salvation history. Growing up Methodist, it sometimes seemed odd that there was something of a gap between the joyful and triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and then the more-joyful Resurrection on Easter. So I invite you to come to your parish church this week, as much as you are able. With all due respect to our British brethren, let's not just “mind the gaps” this Holy Week, let's fill them in.

+In the Name...