

Easter 2, Year B, 2012 ***Hatred and Imagination***

In his novel 'The Power and the Glory', Graham Greene has one of his characters say 'hate was just a failure of imagination'.

The theme of Easter is renewal. The Holy Week and Easter story is about a group of people who were so threatened by new ideas that they put Jesus to death. A failure of imagination that resulted in hatred. Looking at the world today, we see the same forces at work. North Korea might be a long way away, but its threats have the power to destroy the world—and all because the governing clique of old men lacks the ability to admit that new ideas could make things better. A failure of imagination.

If you look at the photos of the installation of the new Dean of St Patrick's in Dublin, you will see pictures of an institution that appears to be ruled by old men, stuck in the past and with little interest in preparing for the future. Is this what our church looks like? Here are some questions for you.

- How many of our offspring attend church? What is there to attract them? Do they see a group of people who live with hearts and minds fixed on the Gospel?
- Where will the clergy of the future come from? Some recent clergy appointments in this diocese have been even older than I am. Already, we are in the position where one post is unfilled because of a shortage of trainee clergy.
- What is your vision of the future for this church? Do you think it can be business as usual, as it has been?

Many people seem to want the church to remain as they think it always was. The thing is, memory plays tricks. They want things to conform to a romantic notion of how they think things used to be. That was not Jesus' way: there was nothing romantic about flights to Egypt, childhood in Nazareth, stomping around the Judean desert, the blood and gore of torture and crucifixion. Like him, we live in a messy world and we must confront it and get our hands dirty, like Thomas. Like Thomas we need to ask questions and push at boundaries to see how best to put our Lord into action. What will the church be like in 10 years' time if we don't do some fresh thinking? We need the courage to ask questions and seek evidence, Thomas-style, and then act on it, Jesus style. We need, in the message of the epistle, to let light triumph over darkness.

We need renewal. We need to experiment. We need to cooperate. We need imagination. Without imagination we would still be scrabbling about in caves. Our future, as the Acts of the Apostles makes crystal clear, lies in togetherness, in openness, in being willing to try new things. Our churches are dying because of constipation from yesterday's diet and yesterday's resentments. Dietary ingredients must remain the same as they always have been—the word of the Lord—but the recipes need the roughage of altering circumstances.

I met a man in hospital, in his 80s, who said to me that the church had lost its way because it had forgotten what love was all about. We need to let God work in us. It's not so much that we need actively to cooperate with God, but rather that we need to stop resisting God. The divine blueprint is there within us. We let it fill us and squeeze out the evil. This means letting the resurrected Jesus point out to us those assumptions and behaviours that are based on fear and hatred, and get rid of them.

Hatred is a failure of imagination. Love is the blossoming of the imagination. Love is expensive. Love demands a letting go. Love is renewal. Love is resurrection. Love is God. Let imagination and love triumph over hatred.