

Life is, let's be honest about this, for the vast bulk of humanity, for the overwhelming amount of time, boring. We are born in tedium, grow up in ennui, live adult lives of languor, retire into the garden of dullness and finally, right at the very end, summon up enough energy to fizzle out and off this monotonous coil. It's just the way it is for most of us most of the time. We are at least living a balanced life: morning, noon and night; bland, bland and bland. Out there, all the time, it's one long Sunday afternoon in the seventies: nothing on, nothing open, nothing to do. You can still get a taste of this any afternoon in small town Suffolk. Three score years and ten and counting stuffed to the gunnels with barely stifled yawns.

That's no bad thing. Really. Why do you think all those old Prayer Book prayers are always pleading with God to let us live our lives in rest and quietness? Archbishop Cranmer knew what it was to live in interesting times and would much rather have just settled into a life of pottering round a bungalow in Littlehampton. Brenda from Bristol, we salute you. Of course, you're likely sat there thinking 'speak for yourself Mr No Life No Friends boring vicar-type.' You probably don't think your life is dull, but that's because over the years, you've been systematically acclimatised, inoculated against the drab, got used to it and started to believe the lie that you're living a glamorous life in the fast lane. Obviously you can take dedication to dullness too far and end up inventing British cuisine, but if you ever long for a more exciting time, just call to mind the fact that it's always easy to pick out those few people whose lives never stop being interesting because of the pronounced tremor in their limbs, the panicked flickering of their panda make-up eyes, their wan hollow cheeks and the frequent anguished pronouncements that what they really, really have always wanted in life was to move to Milton Keynes and become an accountant. People living lives in interesting times rarely want to be. Life really is best when it's boring because otherwise, delicate butterflies that we are, we soon burn ourselves out with the excitement and spiral exhausted to the ground. Life has to be mostly boring in order for us to truly enjoy the few times when it's not. Life is boring. It's meant to be. You wouldn't, couldn't, shouldn't really have it any other way. Too true, there are moments of intense excitement in life: getting married, starting a new job, finding a parking place on Church Road; there's also a bit of mildly diverting business like reading a book or watching TV, a fair bit of waiting (especially if you shop online) and then... a lot of the same old same old, over and over and over, stuck forever looping in Teletubby Land with that voice always and ever crying 'again'!

You might be expecting me to be building up to suggesting that getting the faith is the cure for boredom as it is for most things, that's the sort of thing those Dawn

French's up the front are usually working round to saying, but not me, not today. I don't think you can escape by coming to church. Even the most high octane worship can be prone to a certain dreariness. It's a part of life, and like all other parts of life, religion is boring. Oh yes. I can see I'm going to need to convince you. Religion is boring. All that waving your hands in the air to bad 90s guitar music played by a guy in a gingham shirt and last year's beard. Yawn.

Though as Anglicans monotony is our medium, there is a mode of worship that is even more dreary, a way to pray too wearisome even for us, and though I am loathe to say it in this place on this feast, there is no devotion is quite as tedious as the Rosary. It's the sliced white bread of worship, the post office queue of praise; it's the praying equivalent of being stuck in a lift with Alan Titchmarsh, doing the washing up while waiting for a delivery, listening to someone's tinny headphones when they're playing Cliff's greatest hits while you're stuck on a bus in a traffic jam on Purley Way. You might just want to get off and walk the rest of the way just to relieve the tedium. That in a florid and purple nutshell, is the experience most people have when they roll with the Rosary.

The Rosary is mind-numbing which has its uses: on the few occasions I've forced myself to travel on an airplane it's taken minor surgery to remove the beads from my hands afterwards so firmly have I been beseeching Our Lady to use her influence to keep the lumbering metal giant in the air. A visit to the dentist's chair can always be muted by rattling a virtual Rosary. The beads are a byword for boring.

Which is sort of fitting. After all, really, when you come down to it, admit it, Mary herself is not exactly the most exciting character in the catalogue. Not even in the Bible which, truth be told is not stuffed with 24 hour party animals grabbing life by the horns and living it to the full, not even amid the drab dramatis personae there does Mary stand out. Apart from that one— albeit stunning— outburst of the Magnificat, in the Bible, Mary is merely an adjunct to her son; seeing all and saying nothing, taking it in and treasuring it in her heart. In subsequent Christian piety she has been a bland blank screen onto which the faithful have projected their religious needs and desires.

Let's scroll back a few pages and a passing, blink and you'll miss it allusion to the severely boring nature of British cuisine. Times have so changed in the past 30 years that you might have forgotten what your plates used to be like before they were filled with pasta. The times where meat and two veg - one of which was potatoes- was the norm. The times where Mrs Beaton could seriously propose the monstrosity

that is a bread sandwich. The days when culinary crimes were constantly covered up with starchy slimy gravy. The days when we were suspicious of foreigners because of their fondness for eating... onions. Onions. Onions: the vegetable so boring that when the Bolsheviks were busy confiscating the peasantry's produce to feed the revolution, they left onions off the requisition list. Onions.

I've almost lost myself in the thread of this address, but there is a point which is to point out that we are like onions. Small round and likely to make each other cry; and boring and also, we come with layers. Each and every one of us is layered onion-like. We're not all surface. Our onion layers are physical, psychological and spiritual. Peel off one layer and you'd get another a different looking one but still the same us. Start peeling back the layers and you'd be going a very long time.

This might be the first time you have been to St Mary's church, possibly the second; it may be umpteenth time you've sat in those punishing Victorian pews. If I know anything about people I'd hazard a guess that it's a distinct possibility that at some point in your sojourn- quite possibly today, probably in the last five minutes- you have sat there thinking, OMG this is sooooo boring, when is he going to shut up and get on with it and get it over with so I can get out of here and do something else, anything else. And that's just the regulars. And me. But while for one layer of you, the layer say that easily becomes bored and restless, the layer that is quite happy to sit and watch Strictly, the layer of you where this is the last place you want to be and the last way you want to be spending your time on a Sunday morning; whereas for those layers this whole shaboodle is one big 'nothing doing', dig deeper through the layers, dig deeper through the superficiality, tunnel right down to your soul, and something major is going on.

So worship can be mindnumbingly boring *IF* you are concentrating the surface, if you are expecting instant gratification and easy entertainment, if you expect the process of coming into the presence of God to be in your face and immediate. Personally I'd be suspicious: usually what is instant and immediate is on the surface: bright, glittery and one onion skin deep.

There is a sense that both clicking away at your rosary beads and- say it quietly- traditional Anglican worship are deliberately dull and repetitive, because that way the easily distracted part of your brain- that part we share with dogs- ooh squirrel- is kept occupied so your soul can soar upwards in prayer. Really. Embrace the ennui!

But more importantly still, you cannot judge worship by what's going on on the surface; well you can but it's not the smartest idea. Take that start of it all, baptism. We wet a lot of baby's heads at St Mary's. After the process the candidate will appear to be exactly the same as they were before. A bit damper, but the same. The parents are usually relieved to discover that. And you might think that because there is nothing to see that is different, then nothing is. No wonder they don't charge to baptise somebody, it doesn't actually change anything. But how wrong you would be. Baptism is free, but do not let yourself think that it is therefore of no worth: on the contrary it is priceless. When a person is baptised they undergo the biggest change that will ever happen to them in their life; you don't notice it because it happens at the deepest levels of their being, right at the bottom of all those layers.. When you are brought to baptism, when you come to worship, when you sit here in this place, engaged or not, God is changing you; from the inside out.

When we stand before Jesus when our life is done, when he asks us what we have done with the riches he has given us, when he asks us which master we have served; at that moment, we will have nothing to hide behind, just the bare truth of who we are. It will not be the skins that we shed snake-like as we fall into the big sleep that will matter, only that very deepest, inner one. We can be thankful that at least in this life we have the opportunity to build up what is going on below the surface, we have the opportunity to grow from the inside, out. Right here right now that can seem like the most boring thing going. May be. But you are being offered a rare treasure indeed. Don't let that opportunity slip through your fingers.