

Most people who end up in the pulpit, it is said, only have one sermon in them. It may be a very good one, but, despite the variety of visual aids that may be wheeled out- literally in the case of some Bishops- there's usually only one and all sermons subsequent to the first one are subtle variations on a theme. This I'm sure is a familiar idea. You've had six years plus of watching me tottering up the vertiginous steps to the pulpit so you should be able to recognise the tell-tale signs of Fr Andrew's sermon (again). It will come as no surprise that I start this week by talking about the North of England. I will however endeavour not to say 'ey up' in it. Ah, I think I just have. Anyway...

It's been more than half a lifetime since I set off on the road down south, resolutely refusing to look back. Always grateful to have escaped from the land of flat caps, flat vowels, ferrets and barter, nevertheless over the past decade I have occasionally ventured on the epic trek North to spend time with friends at the Community of the Resurrection, an Anglican order of monks, at their house at Mirfield in West Yorkshire. The monastery is a truly wonderful place: perched on a dramatic Calderdale hillside it's an environment soaked in prayer, a place of stillness and quiet, of contemplation and meditation. Managing all that even in the presence of the on-site seminary that the brothers run.

Nestling at the bottom of the hill, Mirfield town, on the other hand, is a depressingly grubby West Riding settlement, all coal-smoke stained stone terraces, industrial revolution decay and post office queues. The town seems altogether shabby, as if, for the past 30 years it has been too much effort for Mirfield to rouse itself, get up and wipe its public face. All is peeling paint and sticking-plaster repairs. Among the crumbling charity shops and dilapidated corner shops there is, however one always shiny shop in town, sharp with Day-Glo paints and bright light welcome. It's the delightfully named 'Bargain Booze'. Bargain Booze, as you might imagine sells alcohol at cut-down prices, a sort of Poundland for the would-be inebriated. As you'd expect of a cheap off-licence situated close to the North of England's premier theological college, Bargain Booze is obviously doing very well. It has a fleet of lorries to deliver its wares and each lorry is adorned with the timeless corporate slogan:

"Bargain Booze: Making life richer for the poorer"

When I saw this strapline I have to admit I was rather taken aback. Unless this was an attempt at post-modern irony gone tastelessly awry, what on earth are they try-

ing to say? That the cure for poverty is cheap alcohol? Forget slaving, get sloshed, forget the bedroom tax get blotto, forget pauperism, get... p...lastered?

Despite recent signs of a slowdown in the soak stakes, it's still the case that the people of the UK are Europe's worst binge drinkers, that a quarter of British adults and two thirds of teenagers, drink just to get drunk; that in Britain, alcohol is a greater public health risk than obesity, lack of exercise, or illegal drugs.

Now the writer of the letter to Timothy does indeed say 'a little wine is good for the stomach' but I doubt that he is encouraging us to get smashed on Special Brew. Elsewhere, St Paul, is very definite. In his letter to the Galatians, he gives us a whole list of misbehaviours which will lead to exclusion from the Kingdom, a list which, if we are honest, probably excludes the entire membership of the C of E, or at least its clergy.

Fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these... those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In Paul's parade of shame drunkenness is one of the qualifications likely to lead you to have the pearly gates slammed in your face. Perhaps Bargain Booze, despite its advertising fantasies serves only to make the poorer poorer still: financially, in quality of life, and spiritually.

Where, you might be asking, is all this leading? You haven't stepped into the Primitive Protestant Wesleyan Methodist Drink-is-of-the-Devil chapel by mistake, surely? There'll not be an encouragement to sign the teetotal pledge at the end of Eucharist, will there? Not tofay.

Of course it is Pentecost, and we heard earlier how the crowds assumed that the apostles were drunk when the Spirit came upon them. Perhaps if Pentecost had happened in modern day Mirfield Peter's excuse would have sounded more convincing:

"Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. Bargain Booze doesn't open till 10:30!"

Anyway, where this is leading, at this great festival of the Holy Spirit, is to a consideration of that much neglected Christian virtue, the virtue of temperance. In its biblical context, before Victorian puritans got hold of the word, temperance means some-

thing akin to moderation. It's certainly not a virtue whose exercise is limited to alcohol consumption, but in that regard, moderation means that never drinking alcohol is just as far away from temperance as is binge drinking. Temperance, is the virtue, if you like, of measuredness.

Of the four virtues that are enumerated in the book of Wisdom, we don't nowadays hear much about temperance, which is hardly surprising. Swashbuckling Courage always grabs the attention, Justice is admirable and worth fighting for, even Prudence can get the pulse quickening if you're an accounting type, but temperance, by its very definition, is not very exciting. It's the John Major, the magnolia paint, the semolina pudding, of the virtues; it is a virtue that of its nature demands a lack of excitement. In an age of extreme sports, instant Big Brother mega-fame, global villages and designer drugs; where what matters are the big buzzes, the powerful kicks, the instant rushes, the adrenaline highs; temperance is never going to be high on the agenda.

In his letter to the Galatians, after Paul has given us the list of 'things to avoid if you want to get to heaven' he gives us a list of those things by which we might recognise the work of God the Holy Spirit, and it can come as some surprise to us accustomed to thinking of the Spirit as the great rushing of Pentecostal power.

The harvest of the Spirit

St Paul says

is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control

There are no quick hits here, nothing brash and brassy, no spiritual equivalent of bungee-jumping. It is all very... temperate. We may prefer the instant, we may privilege the immediate, we may react most readily to the extreme, but the authentic signs of the Spirit can be found at the other end of the spectrum. We are so conditioned into thinking of the Holy Spirit in terms of the shocking and the showy— speaking in tongues of fire, Toronto blessings, being slain in the Spirit and other such party tricks— that we can be in danger of missing her at work, missing her where she most often is to be found.

I've been to churches where the atmosphere is electric, where the energy is palpable and it is easy to think 'The Spirit is here!' I'm sure she is. But perhaps, we can best gauge how Spirit-filled a church is not by how full it is with the babble of tongues, with the noise of show-stopping deeds of mighty power, with the shrill shriek of self-

assured prophecy— but by how quiet it is; quiet, not because it is empty, not because it's Prayer Book Communion and everyone's gone to sleep, quiet not because the children are pretending to be glued to their pews because they're scared to be children, but quiet but because it is listening. Let those who have ears to hear, listen.

When the Spirit commissions us as Christians to go out to tell the good news to all people, we *are* gifted, like the apostles, with tongues of fire; but we need to go out with ears as well as mouths. This is difficult. It requires that we don't take what we've been given and immediately blow it all in the spiritual equivalent of Bargain Booze. It requires of us patience, generosity, kindness, temperance; in short, the fruits of the Spirit as well as the fire. The temptation is always to drown out everything with the sound of our own voices. It is very easy to be noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. What we need first and foremost is to listen, to *truly* listen to our brothers and sisters:— and to listen attentively to what the Spirit is saying. We may well be surprised.