

August the third, circle it on your calendar, is the day on which one of the greatest human beings who has ever lived, died. So great was she that, in the Rectory at least, this year, which marks the 109th anniversary of her death will be marked with great passion and thanksgiving. Her name was Josephine Cochrane. Who? Josephine Cochrane. You may not know that name but you should, it's a name right up there written in the stars with all the heroes of human endeavour, her place secure in the pantheon of human greatness thanks to her inestimable contribution to the increase of human happiness and wellbeing. Leonardo Da Vinci gave us the Mona Lisa, William Shakespeare gave us plays and sonnets, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart gave us music beyond compare, Jane Austen gave us Mr Darcy, Albert Einstein gave us physics, but Josephine Cochrane topped 'em all, she gave us the gift that puts all other achievements in the shades, the mother of all gifts to humanity. For, Josephine Cochrane gave us the dishwasher. What a woman.

Nobody has ever given me a dishwasher, I've always bought my own, but if anyone had, it would have been the best gift ever, at least until the day some even brighter spark invents the automatic ironing machine. Never been given a dishwasher, I have been given a breadmaker though, and unlike most people who have been the recipient of this modern marvel gadget it's regularly used. I know this is unusual, because survey after survey tells us that the bread maker is the least used appliance given as a gift. Almost all breadmakers tell the same tale: they sit on a shelf for months at Argos, for one brief giddy moment in December they are wrapped in gaudy gift-wrap, then they are unwrapped and spend the rest of their days gathering dust on a shelf at home. Why?

A breadmaker is not like a food processor which takes a lifetime to clean after the briefest use- there's not much to a bread machine so washing up is a breeze. Nor is it like the electric wok, a solution in search of a problem: for many of us bread still figures high on our eat sheets. There are two problems for the breadmaking gadget, I suspect, over and above the fact that it's much easier just to buy bread from the supermarket, even if that bread does resemble recycled polystyrene. One, is that even with a machine, it takes the thing several hours to make bread, which is more time than we can bear give for any activity- give me it now or don't bother. And two, even when the machine has produced its admittedly tasty bread, that's not the end of the process. Because bread doesn't cut itself, you have to, and who's got the time to do that?

The whole point of breadmaker and dishwashers and the whole panoply of domestic gadgets is to save you the effort so you can go and do something more enjoyable instead. Dishwashers undoubtedly save time. You'd have thought their owners would be happy, and yet the biggest complaint you hear about dishwashers is that you have to empty them, which speaks volumes. I once presided at a funeral where the most prominent memory of the departed cherished by the chief mourners was that she would 'do anything for anyone'. Nothing unusual there you might say, this is a fairly common thing the grieving feel, but this person was different, special: she would do anything for anyone, she would even, she would even empty your dishwasher. What a woman.

Anyway, the point of this foray into the world of white goods kitchen appliances is that no matter how much time they save you, it is never enough. You can never save enough time because like gas expanding to fill all the available space, your 'to-do' list swells to fill any time you save; if you make a gap in your schedule it immediately fills up; the more efficient you become, the more you have to do. Try to save yourself time and you are Sisyphus, pushing the rock up the hill only to see it roll all the way, every time, back down to the bottom.

You see, despite our ever-increasing busy-ness, despite never quite getting on top of everything, despite there never being enough hours in the day, despite the ever-lengthening list of things we *must* do before we die, the problem with our lives is not lack of time. We have all the time in the world. The problem is something altogether different.

It is no coincidence that the increasingly unbelieving world we inhabit is a busier and busier world, frantic to be up and doing, busy convincing itself of its own worth. Gap years, bucket lists, YOLO; late at the office, take your work home, up till the small hours, two jobs; partying, experiencing, once-in-a-lifetime adventuring. Busy, busy, busy, busy. But all the activity has one purpose, to fill the aching empty gap in our souls, that God-shaped space at the heart of all of us. That space can only be filled by the Holy Spirit and we think we can fill it with busy-ness and bucket lists. What fools we are. We are hungry and stuffing our bellies with straw, slaking our thirst with seawater; instead of resting, we are reaching for the Red Bull.

St Bede lived all his life in a monastery at Jarrow. He was sent there at the age of seven, and he never left it thereafter. He spent his entire life in that monastery. Just one little place in the north east of England, and if you think the North is grim now,

think what it would have been like in the Dark Ages. You would be hard pressed to find a smaller world to inhabit. He wrote a lot of books, but it would be difficult to say, by 21st century standards that the Venerable Bede lived life to the full, grabbed it by the horns and rode it for all he was worth: by modern standards Bede barely lived at all. He went nowhere, he did nothing, he had no interesting experiences, partook in no extreme sports. Yet the saint did not fret away his time making bucket lists of the 1000 places he wanted to go do before he died: his bucket list consisted of one place, the place he wanted to go after he died.

And so finally, we've arrived at the Gospel reading for today, a Gospel for the twenty-first century if ever there was one. I know it was only a few minutes ago but let's remind ourselves again of what it says.

*Martha ... had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

Jesus is not saying 'forget the menial tasks', recommending his followers become starving unwashed layabout scroungers that would send the Daily Mail into paroxysms of outraged ecstasy. That's not what this is about. The work still needs to be done. Food needs to be prepared, dishes need to be washed, disciples still need to 'do'. What it's about is *focus* and *priorities*. What's important? What's actually important? And what's keeping you away from it? What is it that's taking up all your time and attention? Is it actually worth all that fretting and worrying or is there something more important?

The world we live in, the world we cannot but be part of, is turning into a Marthaverse. 'I do therefore I am'. 'Doing' is no longer a means to an end, it's become the end itself.

But only one thing is needed. Let's be honest with ourselves. Just me and you. No one else can hear. How much is that one thing the core of your life? Is Jesus anywhere near the centre? I know that for you he's more than the bit that fills up an hour and a half every other Sunday morning before ASDA opens. But how much more?

Choosing the better part can't just be about church on Sunday. That's what, an hour and fifteen, an hour and thirty minutes. I think that's great, obviously. You don't know how much it makes my day when you come to St Mary on a Sunday. But put it into perspective. Many people will spend an hour and a half each week in the supermarket. If you work you might spend an hour and a half *each day* commuting. So an hour and a half each week for God? It's not enough.

Jesus must be the first thing in your life. He's not just another of the many things we have to juggle with. School. Job. Relationship. Children. Leisure. Shopping. God. Your work is not more important than God. School is not more important than God. Dare I say it football is not more important. Not even your nearest and dearest are more important. Sorry. Each day should be p p p punctuated by times when you sit at the feet of Jesus, times of reorientation, Mary moments that are where your life is really lived.

Say your prayers. Read your Bible. Put your money where your mouth is. *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Where would a stranger who looked at your ledgers say your treasure is?

Live your life as though Jesus were just round the corner. He isn't of course. He's much closer than that.

When you stepped through that door this morning, like Mary, you chose the better part. You did. Just don't let the cares and distractions, the frets and worries of life take it away from you. Be certain, if you let them, they will.