



Friday 9.30am Holy Eucharist Lent 1

Today's readings appear to be full of threats.

Actually they are full of consequences.

Sin has an effect. It corrodes and distorts.

I'm fond of saying we are clay in Christ The Potter's hands. As we go through life, through every person and work and situation, we are being formed by Jesus.

Likewise, we can be formed by the other guy. Sin can mar and mis-shape us.

Ezekiel typifies Old Testament logic for us today: we do wrong and then God spades on the wrath and disaster.

In an eager search to make sense of the world there's a kind of logic there. Many people still lurch into seeing the world like this - God does this bad stuff, like a punishment, for the bad stuff we have done.

But actually, much more straightforward, is the theological and practical reality that **sin has an effect**. When we abuse the natural balance of the earth and its resources, when we set off the spiral of inhuman human relations, when we set ourselves up on God's throne, in all sorts of ways, things go wrong – short term and long. Shaking our fists and blaming someone else or slotting into an easy theological cartoon may be tempting, but its simply not the full picture.

I was fortunate to be on a Facebook live seminar with the wonderful Anglican priest-poet Malcolm Guite, recently retired from Girton College, Cambridge. It was an hour of him walking through Dante's *Comedia*. Of many fascinating insights was his saying of those in punishment (if we look carefully), that they are simply living with the reality of their earthly shortcomings. It's not so much God playing a sick joke and 'punishments fitting the crime', Fr Malcolm said, but people simply living out the sad reality of the effects on their nature and personhood of what they have done. Pride poisons us. Lies mess us up. Greed distorts us. Envy corrodes us. Lust blinds and narrows us.

If we hear today's Gospel in this light we see, perhaps, something new. Jesus is not issuing threats, He is simply explaining what will, sadly, be.

Our pilgrimage through Lent is to prepare us to celebrate Easter with joy.

Our pilgrimage through life and what follows is to prepare us for the life of heaven.

God's desire, the *point* of His Church, and our hearts' *truest* desire (whether we know it or not), is that we will truly *belong* when we get there; that the natural consequence of our journeying will be to step with joyful belonging into the light of the Resurrection at Easter and into the embrace of heaven's eternal Eastertide.

Thank God for His patience and mercy; and may we with joy submit ourselves in Christ The Potter's hands, and no one else's.