

CONFERENCE EUCHARIST HOMILY

National Cathedrals Conference, 17 September 2018: Manchester

On feast days, especially if there is a tedious Te Deum, I treat myself to scrambled eggs. If the truth be told, I only come to these conferences for the cooked breakfast. By themselves, the eggs do not taste of much. It is the salt that makes them wonderfully eggy, the fish fishy, the meat meaty and so on. It brings out the taste of everything else. You don't eat salt for its own sake.

Similarly, you do not turn on the light into order to look at the light bulb, but to see what else is in the room. The Church is salt and light by how we delight in others. Will Hutton and Mona Siddiqui both implicitly called on us to shed the light of God's pleasure on the invisible, the strangers, the people left behind. We delighted even in the people whom society calls bad. Our society wallows in accusation. People are defined for every by their failures which lurk on Google for ever. If you commit a murder, even a small one which any of us may do some time, you are forever defined as a murderer. But we believe that good people do bad things. In Christ, the goodness has the victory.

But if we shine the light and sprinkle the salt on others, we will inevitably be scrutinised ourselves. A city set on a hill top cannot be hidden. The media will peer and burrow. It will not always be the case that people see our good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven! The Royal Commission is holding us to account for hideous abuse. Some of you have even been nervous of appearing as bad as the Catholics! Condemn zero hours contracts, and inevitably it will be discovered that we have made them too. A city set on a hill top cannot be hidden.

We all hate this harsh light because who is going to listen to our preaching now? What credibility can we have? The decent majority about whom Dan Jarvis spoke so movingly, will want to have nothing to do with us. People will feel let down. One day a peasant ran up to Francis of Assisi and said, 'Take heed that you be in truth as all people say you are, for many have great faith in you. Be no other than what people take you to be.' But we have been shown to be not as people have thought.

A city set on a hill top cannot be hidden. And it is good. If the spotlight shows our failures, there is a chance that we shall address them. Let us hope that because of all this media attention, even if some of it is false, we shall become holier. We may dread the spotlight of the press, but it does summon us to be true disciples.

Even more, these shameful revelations may even become part of our witness to the gospel. When the persecution broke out under Nero, many Christians behaved badly, betrayed each other, and denied Christ. And if Mark's gospel really is Peter's memoirs, then Peter did an extraordinary thing: he owned up to having denied Christ himself. I do not know the man. He placed himself in

the spotlight. In this awful crisis of Nero's persecution, Peter refused an apostolic cover up. Hang on to something: I did it. The rock on which the Church is built stumbled. Paul did the same thing. He owned up to being the murderer of Christians that he had been. You have to be with divine or stupid to make Peter the rock on which the Church is built. Take your choice.

I am not suggesting that we should actually broadcast our failures. Basil Hume's predecessor, Cardinal Heenan, called his autobiography, *Not the Whole Truth!* I certainly have no desire for everyone to know my failures. As a young friar I once spent a rather sleepless night in a four poster in Germany with a large Eye of God looking at me searchingly. I have no desire to be unmasked.

But a city set on a hilltop cannot be hidden. Some of the accusations are unjust and wrong. Others are spot on. But if we have the courage of Peter and Paul, then it can even be part of our preaching. Yes, good people do indeed do very bad things, and some of those people are us. Yes, God does choose people like us to be his witnesses. Thanks be to God!

Father Timothy Radcliffe

20 September 2018