

At this Easter Monday's Eucharist, I suggested that an adoption of the Polish custom for the day – they call it Wet Monday – of splashing people liberally with water might be a good way of maintaining the proper character of this joyful Eastertide. No need to limit the splashing to Easter Monday. Throw it about till Pentecost, I suggested. I bet none of you have taken up that suggestion.

However, it's not too late - and with the easing of lockdown restrictions the impact of the gesture can now be greater than it would have been ten days ago. Not at all impossible, I think, to form a glad and seemly procession from one or more of our churches armed with aspergers to sprinkle gently with holy water those indulging their new freedom by sitting, say, outside on the road at the Angel. A vivid reminder, this sprinkling, of the new life on offer through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We do have an Easter Gospel to proclaim, after all, and doing that proclamation just to one another perhaps isn't wholly sufficient, however many alleluias we might pronounce.

Making that proclamation beyond the doors of our churches or our homes in the way I am proposing would be to put ourselves at less risk, I think, than our predecessors, the first apostles, exposed themselves to according to today's reading from Acts, in which they confront the Jewish leaders, possibly a tad aggressively, with the Gospel of Jesus crucified and raised. Jesus *whom you had killed*, isn't exactly tactful mollification, is it? It's a bit in yer face and up yer nose. And the Jewish leaders don't take it well. 'They were enraged and wanted to kill them.'

Well, the water flicked over customers outside a pub might also be in yer face and up yer nose, in some sense. But it would be a very gentle kind of assault. It might cause a little annoyance as well as some amusement and even joy but it would be unlikely to stimulate a desire to commit murder. We might even get offered a beer. In

any case, the stakes would be rather lower for us than for Peter and co.

On Sunday Mark talked about the appropriateness of Prince Philip's death occurring in the Easter season. Appropriate because it is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus that together are the foundation of Christian lives seriously and actively committed to the service of others, as was the Duke of Edinburgh's. This is the problem, I'm afraid with my daintily joyous asperging procession – it really can't be considered a walking of the way of the cross in solidarity with the Saviour who suffers for us. The apostles, in contrast, do set themselves on the way of the Cross by provoking the rage of their interlocuters.

The apostles see themselves as making a vital choice between obedience to God and obedience to human beings, or to put it another way, a way suggested by the reference to God's wrath at the end of our gospel passage, a choice between enduring the anger of human beings or that of God. 'Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.'

I wonder if my imaginary procession, calibrated as it is not to offend deeply the sensibilities of sprinkled Witneyites, fails to make a decisive choice in favour of obedience to God and so would risk that terrible condition described as enduring God's wrath. I wonder whether much of what we customarily do in our Christian life fails to make a decisive and potentially costly choice for God's way but rather seeks an accommodation between obedience to God and to human beings, seeks a way to evade both the painfulness of enduring the wrath of God by obeying God up to a point *and* the painfulness of bearing the brunt of human anger by not going too far, offensively far, in obedience to the divine will. No doubt we have found ourselves cheering on the Apostles as we listened to today's reading but are we prepared to join them in their difficult defiance? Are we prepared to defy, to disengage from, to prophesy

against, what is normative in our society, normative but in disobedience to the will of God, or do we prefer to risk God's wrath for the sake of a superficial ease among our fellow human beings?

Today's readings foreground hostility, strife, anger and the threat of death. These emphases deliver something of a slap in the face to my facile recommendation of a pleasant way of continuing Easter joy till the end of the Easter season. My less facile recommendation now of that continuation till Pentecost - and, indeed, beyond - requires of you an embrace of the suffering entailed in any serious following of Jesus, an embrace of the denial of self, the giving of self, the sacrifice of self, an embrace of the way of the cross, an embrace of the cross. As Mark insisted on Sunday, you cannot separate the crucifixion and the resurrection; *together* they express the glory of God; *together* they deliver God's glorious victory over sin and death. In the light of this glory we are invited to live and to live joyously. Because Easter *is* about joy, the joy latent in a suffering love, a kind of joy that is the joy of God which we are called to imitate and enact, a joy which doesn't disrespect the world's suffering but is nevertheless a proper reaction to the deepest truth about that suffering - which is that God out of his love bears it with us, transforms it for us, glorifies it for us, makes it ultimately a joy for him and for us. 'It is a joy, a bliss, an endless delight to me that ever I suffered my Passion for you and if I could suffer more, I should suffer more,' says Jesus to Julian of Norwich.

Truly to embrace the cross and therefore truly to experience the joy of the resurrection perhaps requires an inspection of what we do for compromise between obedience to God and obedience to human beings, an inspection of our behaviour for accommodation to the ways of the world. We should look to the risky courage of the Apostles' witness and ask what risks we are taking for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps we shall find our obedience to God, our love of God, compromised in an unriskey and world-accommodating behaviour in respect of the great wrongs of our age, among them

complacencies about poverty and prejudice and the lack of purpose and progress in ameliorating the state of the planet in the face of our carbon consumption. Of course, we make our limited gestures in relation to these issues and our loving God will honour and use them. But surely we are called to the uncompromising, risk-taking, joyous boldness of the Apostles, to a certain exuberant carelessness as to what the world thinks in favour of a whole-hearted commitment to the leading of the Spirit.

So perhaps in relation to the great wrongs to which I have just referred, we should make sure that we risk rebuke and disdain by getting out there and seriously into people's faces and up their noses; perhaps we should be prepared to risk stirring up trouble at the leading of the forceful, fiery Holy Spirit, the Spirit through whom Jesus speaks the words of God and acts on what he has heard from God. Perhaps we should risk, say, getting arrested for the sake of the Kingdom - like the Apostles. And, indeed, like Jesus. I wonder whether Bishop Steven might see that as a way of becoming a more courageous and therefore more Christlike church.

I fear I lack the courage to accept my own recommendations – or at least to follow them through on my own. But what's a church for unless it's about its members seeking together to discern, and then supporting one another in following, the biddings of the Spirit, in response to which the first Christians turned the world upside down?