

## Jesus entered the Temple and drove out all who were selling and buying.

(Dedication Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020, Matthew 21 v 12)

In January 1937, the poet, WH Auden, arrived in Barcelona, hoping to serve as an ambulance driver on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. He was 29 years old, and, a precocious young man, had been an atheist since the age of 13. He was morally serious and attracted to socialism, perhaps even communism. When he arrived he discovered that all of Barcelona's 58 churches were locked and that 48 of them had been seriously torched inside, not by the enemy but by the citizens of Barcelona, who were disgusted by the Church's long support of the aristocracy and forgetting of the poor. Auden was surprised to discover that he was horrified, and that his horror was not the horror any civilised person would have at the destruction of ancient monuments. Instead, he came to feel, that to destroy churches is to destroy the human soul. This was the strange beginning of Auden's journey towards Christian faith a few years later. I wonder what you think of that: to destroy churches is to destroy the human soul. And the horror of something missing helping someone to discover that thing.

Fast forward to the year 2080, 60 years from now. The Church of England, strapped for cash, realises that we only need one church in Maldon, and that the Council would be willing to pay handsomely to replace St Mary's with a car park and a leisure centre. I do understand that my story is grotesque, but what would Maldon be like without St Mary's? What was it like for sea farers one thousand three hundred years ago coming up the river only to see a gloomy hill? And what comfort have sailors felt during the last few hundred years to see the welcome of our tower.

St Mary's is, in a way, this part of Maldon's soul. You would have something terribly missing inside you to live in the parish and not love St Mary's. People who have never been inside it are glad it is here. It exists not only on the outside, it exists inside them, the part of themselves, which is there, but which they have never yet visited – where Jesus Christ dwells, waiting to be known. The human soul *is* Jesus Christ. And there are many, many, people who have not yet gone inside their own souls. They enjoy the outside but have no idea of the riches within.

The story of Jesus cleansing the Temple is also about the cleansing of the human heart. Read the story in John's gospel where this is clearer than in Matthew. Or elsewhere in the New Testament. 'Do you not know,' says St Paul, that you are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.' God lives deep within every person. St Teresa of Avila calls us the Interior Castle. And her famous book, the Interior Castle, is an invitation to come inside.

The new website is up and running. It is part of St Mary's renewal. For the home page, desiring as we do, to be a church **from** 33 AD, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **from** 1140, 750, whenever we started, but **for** a new age, we did not put up a picture of the church, but of the Link door from the outside, and beside the door we superimposed the words, '**St Mary's, a Church on Pilgrimage.**' And then on the gallery page there are pictures of St Mary's from the air and the river, the organ being built, and on other pages, evidence of our living faith in Jesus Christ.

You will recall the conversation we were having about the new organ a year ago. Excited as we were about the organ, we knew how awful it would be if our music was the best for miles around, but our soul was dead. This has often happened in the life of the Church of England. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the C of E was brilliant at ceremony and robes and bishops, but we had forgotten what these things were for. And God raised up saints who were prepared to sit light to all this stuff and go to the margins and convert the poor. It is said that the Methodist revival saved England from the bloody revolution that France underwent. And you will notice that in today's gospel after Jesus pronounced the Temple a den of robbers it says that 'the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he cured them.

I know that in St Mary's there is a deep hope in real spiritual renewal; in which we who are already here enter, perhaps for the first time, parts of the Temple, parts of our own souls, that we do not even yet know to be there. And because we are entering the Link Door of the Church on Pilgrimage, inwards to the hidden soul, outwards towards other people and strangers, we are going to create the same possibility for others, people we would not yet have dreamed of meeting.

My horror story for 60 years from now could not possibly be true, not simply because of the law about grade one listed buildings but because a people who are fully alive, pass on life to the next generation. Amen.