

Dowry

Winter 2022-2023
Issue N°56

“O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England thy Dowry.”



In this issue:

**Editorial: Pope Benedict XVI, R.I.P.
Adrian IV, The English Pope – Part 2
Watching *The Chosen*?
Refugees Find A Home In Catholic Tradition
Young Catholics Mourn Cardinal George Pell
Art: Claude Lorrain’s *Seaport by Sunset*
Support our Apostolate**

Picture: Cardinal Ratzinger offers a Pontifical High Mass at the International Seminary of St Peter in Wigratzbad, the FSSP Motherhouse in Germany, on Easter Sunday 1990.

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Editorial: Pope Benedict XVI, R.I.P.



Homily at the Solemn Mass of Requiem for Pope Benedict XVI on 7 January 2023 in Warrington

We mourn the late Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, who passed away just a week ago, on 31st December 2022. In this solemn Mass of Requiem, we pray for the repose of his soul.

In just 5 years, Joseph Ratzinger would have been 100 years old. He was elected pope in 2005 and reigned 8 years until his resignation in 2013. For the following decade, he lived in retirement in the Vatican.

The Priestly Fraternity of St Peter felt close to Pope Benedict XVI in many ways. He was personally involved in our foundation in 1988, granting audiences to our founders in Rome. He was the one who suggested Bavaria to Pope John-Paul II as the first house of our Fraternity. A Bavarian himself by birth and a former Archbishop of Munich, he knew of the Marian shrine of Wigratzbad near Lake Constance, and supported the founding of our motherhouse there. The local bishop, of Augsburg, gave his permission and we started our first seminary there, fulfilling a local approved prophecy about *priestly renewal in fidelity with Rome*. As Prefect of the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger visited our motherhouse 18 months later. He attended the Easter Vigil, stayed the night and celebrated a pontifical high Mass in the traditional form on Easter morning. It was of course a cause of particular joy when Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI. His election took everyone by surprise, starting with himself. Just a few days earlier, on March 24, 2005, he had led the Stations of the Cross at the Colosseum in Rome, asking:

What can the third fall of Jesus under the Cross say to us? We have considered the fall of man in general, and the falling of many Christians away from Christ and into a godless secularism. Should we not also think of how much Christ suffers in his own Church? How often the holy sacrament of his Presence is abused, how often he must enter empty and evil hearts! How often we

celebrate only ourselves, without even realizing that he is there! How often his Word is twisted and misused! What little faith is present behind so many theories, so many empty words! How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him! How much pride, how much self-complacency! What little respect we pay to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where he waits for us, ready to raise us up whenever we fall! All this is present in his Passion. His betrayal by his disciples, their unworthy reception of his Body and Blood, is certainly the greatest suffering endured by the Redeemer; it pierces his heart. We can only call to him from the depths of our hearts: Kyrie eleison—Lord, save us!

Those were stern words spoken about the Church, in the very same time as she awaited a new pope.

Such words showed that Cardinal Ratzinger did not see the *springtime* promised by Vatican II thirty years earlier. Then-Fr Joseph Ratzinger had participated in Vatican II as an expert theologian. He was well qualified to pass judgement on its implementation and its legacy.



As Pope Benedict XVI, he released the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* on 7 July 2007. Two years earlier in his native Germany, he had attended World Youth Day for the first time as pope, in Cologne. He had been made aware of the participation of one thousand traditional young Catholics with the *Juventutem* traditional youth movement. At Cologne, one young adult for every thousand was registered as *traditional*. Pope Benedict personally knew the main advocates of the traditional liturgy, and had studied the reasons supporting it. But certainly the sight of so many young people officially taking part in a major Church event such as WYD will have stayed in his memory when he wrote to the bishops of the world to present *Summorum Pontificum* to them:

It has clearly been demonstrated that young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly suited to them.

Three years later, we in Great Britain had the joy of his visit in September 2010. Despite the contrary advice of prophets of doom, Pope Benedict had persevered in his desire to visit the land of John-Henry Newman and had made his apostolic tour a spectacular success.

He came to Hyde Park the day before beatifying Cardinal Newman. To be more precise, the area of Hyde Park where he stood and later knelt in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was Tyburn. That is, it included the very spot where hundreds of Catholics were horribly tortured and executed for their love of Christ and Church. I was there on that 18th September 2010 having



(Pictures: Emblem for Pope Benedict XVI's funeral, © FSSP Roma; Mass at Tyburn prior to papal vigil at Hyde Park, © Joseph Shaw Flickr.)

arranged to offer Holy Mass in the crypt of the Tyburn convent, right across the street from the papal vigil. In the crypt, all of us pilgrims could see the many relics of martyrs displayed on the walls. Above the altar, a canopy replicates the very shape of the gibbet where our brethren died, the so-called *Tyburn tree*. What a grace the next hour to worship the Eucharistic God in public, led by the Vicar of Christ. The hope of the martyrs had been fulfilled. From the scaffold they had looked into the future. What they had prayed for through painful love; what they had glanced at in burning hope, three centuries later we, their progeny, were now witnessing with our eyes of flesh. Their faith was vindicated and their sufferings were proved fruitful in this wondrous event, the first ever State visit of a pope in this realm, illustrating what Cardinal Ratzinger had declared ten years earlier as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

The Christian faithful are therefore not permitted to imagine that the Church of Christ is nothing more than a collection—divided, yet in some way one—of Churches and ecclesial communities; nor are they free to hold that today the Church of Christ nowhere really exists, and must be considered only as a goal which all Churches and ecclesial communities must strive to reach". In fact, "the elements of this already-given Church exist, joined together in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other communities (Dominus Jesus #17, 6 August 2000).

The day before, Pope Benedict had stood in Westminster Hall on the very spot where St Thomas More had been tried, as the Speaker of the House recalled in his introduction. Pope Benedict had reminded the full British establishment that:

Religion... is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national

conversation. In this light, I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance. There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue—paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination—that

Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square. I would invite all of you, therefore, within your respective spheres of influence, to seek ways of promoting and encouraging dialogue between faith and reason at every level of national life.

Despite these uncompromising words, or rather *because* of them, Pope Benedict's visit was hailed as a moment of grace, when truth had been spoken with charity and clarity, by the only one invested with divine authority to teach all men: the Vicar of Christ. In his farewell speech, then-Prime Minister David Cameron thanked Pope Benedict:



(Pictures: Main FSSP Founder Fr Josef Bisig and Pope Benedict XVI, © FSSP; Next page: Pope Adrian IV; www.britannica.com/Creative Commons.)

Your Holiness, on this truly historic first State Visit to Britain you have spoken to a nation of six million Catholics but you have been heard by a nation of more than 60 million citizens and by many millions more all around the world.

Pope Benedict's visit made it beautifully clear that to be a Catholic in Great Britain (and elsewhere) was good. Catholicism was praised by the State as something of interest to the nation and beneficial to the world. Following his visit, vocations rose consistently, Catholics hoped again and converts knocked at the doors of the Church more eagerly.

The positive effects we experienced here in Great-Britain only mirrored those felt across the universal Church through the guidance and example of Pope Benedict XVI. His

resignation ten years ago was a devastating shock.

Let us pray for the repose of his soul. The mandate of a pope is to confirm and strengthen in the apostolic faith the flock of Christ entrusted to him by Christ and for Christ. Writing, travelling, smiling and praying are all means to that end in any pontificate. As the soul of Pope Benedict XVI stands before Christ for judgment, such is the main criterion for assessment: Have you fed my sheep with the Revelation and sacraments I have granted them? Have you made them more confident and fruitful as the members of my mystical body the Church? Have you attracted to my Church, the only ark of salvation, as

many non-Catholics and pagans as you could, using the time-proven resources of apologetics and sanctification? Peter, have you loved me? Have you loved me, not with feelings sentimental or popular, but with that love showing through fidelity to my word as transmitted to my Church, and believed and professed by her everywhere from the beginning?

May God be merciful to Pope Benedict XVI, we intercede. May God guide the successor of Pope Benedict, Pope Francis, to feed the flock of Christ always more faithfully to the Petrine mandate: *Simon, son of Jonah, if you love me, feed my sheep.*

Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP, Superior of the FSSP England Apostolate □

Malleray

Adrian IV, The English Pope – Part 2

By young convert and historian Adam Mercer—continued from Dowry N°54, Summer 2022

Breakspear was elected pope Adrian IV on 4th December 1154, unanimously as was said, enthroned on the 5th and crowned on the 6th. Unfortunately for Adrian his pontificate began in a rather troubling time. Rome was then a Commune ruled by Arnold of Brescia, a proto-Protestant canon who wished for the Church to renounce all property-ownership. Wishing to regain control of the City, the pope allied with Emperor Frederick I who swiftly captured Rome in 1155 and expelled Arnold. Later that year however Arnold was captured by Imperial soldiers, brought before the Papal court and was hanged and burned for his crimes. This theme of political turmoil would continue for practically all of Adrian's papacy, and he was seen as more of a politician than a theologian, a trait which Pope Eugenius III saw in him when making him a cardinal.

At the same time as Adrian's conflict against Arnold, the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I struggled against King William I of Sicily whom Adrian had recently excommunicated. Pope and Emperor agreed to an alliance lest William crept into the Papal States. Despite the combined force of the Roman and Byzantine armies, the Sicilians ultimately won and William retained full control of Sicily, with Adrian having to ask for peace. This weakened Adrian's international reputation, especially as one considered that, willing as he was to

reunite all of Europe under the Church, yet the Pope could not defeat a single kingdom despite being helped by arguably the strongest Empire in the world at that moment in history.

In regard to his native England, Adrian had mixed feelings. Unsurprisingly during his papacy English influence in Rome was at its strongest and the Pope promoted King Henry II's political ambitions. He also granted his home abbey of St Albans generous privileges. However, in the words of Richard Southern, he bore no affection for a country that gave him "no reasons to cherish warm feelings" about it. He had to deal with quite a few disruptions in England, including that of Nigel, Bishop of Ely, who having sold a lot of monastic treasures, was threatened with suspension from his office. By far the most significant interaction with England was the Papal Bull *Laudabiliter* of 1155, in which he granted the right to the governance of Ireland to King Henry II, whence he became the first Lord of Ireland and started England's control of Ireland until the 20th century.

As to Adrian's theological concerns, he was aware of the crushing responsibilities of the office and told John of Salisbury that the Papal tiara was "splendid because it burned with fire", and recognised the importance of the Petrine tradition.



Prior to his papacy he authored a number of works including a catechism for the Scandinavia he helped evangelise, although many of his writings have been lost to history.

Due to the heavy burden of the papacy, especially in times of imperial pressure, Adrian IV died on 1st September 1159 aged 58-59, and was buried in St Peter's three days later. Rather than being able to continue his great evangelisation efforts like in Scandinavia, Adrian spent the majority of his term dealing with wars and kings, and acting more as a politician than a theologian. If born in a more peaceful time, his efforts in theology may have gone much further than they were able to in his life. Nicholas Breakspear became the first and so far the only pope from the British Isles, but hopefully not the last. □

Watching *The Chosen*?

Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP discusses the limitations and merits of a successful series on the life of the Lord Jesus

Evangelise
The Lord Jesus expects all of us to help spread the Good News of salvation. But Western Christianity is in decline, and Catholicism in particular. The question is: how do we persuade the world that only Jesus and his Church answer all their needs, starting with the vital need for divine grace? Learning our faith from sound sources and implementing it through reverent liturgies is necessary. But it must further be brought to fruition through active evangelisation. While prayers and sacrifices offered in

monasteries, in convents and at home are necessary (and must increase!), they also call for men and women to reach out to the world through visible means and tactical initiatives.

Today's teenagers are the world of tomorrow. Then, where are the young people? Online. Smartphones made watching online content easy; while the Covid confinement made it the only leisure left to many for months or years. *Netflix* now has approximately 220 million global paid memberships, while *every day*

1 billion hours of videos are watched on *YouTube*. On average, globally in 2022 every person spent just under 7 hours per day online. These considerations seem to me a prerequisite to discuss the relevance of a series like *The Chosen* in 2023.

Highly successful, *The Chosen* introduces itself as the first-ever multi-season series based on the true stories of the gospels of Jesus Christ. Its *Facebook* page is liked by 1.2 million people and followed by 2.7 million. Entirely crowd-funded, it is available online for free for anyone





to watch. Its Protestant author means *The Chosen* as a work of evangelisation. However successful a film may be though, it should be kept at bay if it undermines the truth of the Catholic faith. Thus, should Catholics keep away from *The Chosen*? I offer the following thoughts (about the first *two* seasons only).

Imagination

I was cautious. I watched and liked it. It is well filmed, beautiful and respectful. But is *inventing* so many anecdotes legitimate? Admittedly, the characterisation of the apostles, of the holy women, and other protagonists such as Nicodemus or the Roman centurion includes many elements which are not part of the New Testament. Nor do they contradict the datum of revelation. In retrospect, Catholic devotion has always relied on the prudent and deferential use of imagination, as illustrated in fine arts (Bl. Fra

Angelico never saw the evangelical settings which he so eloquently painted), spiritual writings sometimes very detailed (e.g. Bl. Ann Catherine Emmerich's visions), and even in the liturgy (a *Gloria* composed by Mozart does not claim to be a literal recording of the angels' hymn on Christmas night). St Ignatius Loyola recommends such recourse to pious imagination in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

A few examples

The relationship between Nicodemus and his wife is finely portrayed. It credibly depicts the hindrances and attractions influencing the shy follower of Christ. The healing of St Mary Magdalene by Christ is filmed with eloquent simplicity. At Cana, Christ plunges his hands in the jars and slowly takes them out as the red liquid flows from his palms and between his fingers. This is a remarkable anticipation of the Holy

Eucharist and even of the Crucifixion. Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well is very convincing and enlightening.

Apostles

St Matthew's portrayal as affected by obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is original and makes it easier for viewers with less outgoing temperaments to relate to him. One of the many humorous but always respectful lines occurs when Jesus tells Matthew just converted that they are to meet for supper. Insecure Matthew objects, "I'm not welcome at dinner parties." Jesus replies with a witty smile, "That won't be a problem tonight. You're the host." The training of Simon the Zealot (member of group of religious insurgents using violence against the Roman occupier) is tragically realistic, conjuring up news images of religious fundamentalists in our modern age. The "calling" of Judas



is very cleverly brought about as the idealistic and cunning young man makes his way to the site of the Sermon on the Mount.

A recurrent theme is the constant interaction between the apostles. One is almost relieved when realising that they often disagreed, argued and that there was no love lost among some of them. The scenario invents many details that illustrate well what the Gospels tell us about the pettiness and jealousy that marred the apostolic college, at least in its early years. The key lesson one learns is that this band of average men was kept together and gradually forged as one body (all the way to martyrdom) through their shared attraction to the mysterious rabbi of Nazareth.

One episode focusses on the conversations among apostles and saintly women around the campfire. Dissensions appear. All along, Our Lord is absent, kept busy as we are

told by a never-ending queue of sick and tormented souls seeking his help on the outskirts of the camp. The episode ends with Our Lord showed walking, almost staggering, behind the circle of his disciples. Looking beyond exhaustion, he whispers good night before nearly collapsing into his hut. It powerfully manifests how Christ wore himself out in his daily ministry on behalf of the people, in anticipation of the Hour of his Passion as sung in the *Dies Irae*: *Quaerens me sedisti lassus— Seeking me thou didst sit weary.*

Messianic and sacrificial outlook

A totally fictional episode is the arrest and interrogation of Our Lord by the Roman tribune years before his Passion. It unfolds plausibly and helps a lot to understand the psychology of the apostles (frightened), of the Romans (boastful, yet intrigued) and of Our Lord (in subdued control until the time for real confrontation comes).

References to the Old Testament are apposite, as in that episode starting with Moses' brazen serpent from *Exodus*. It points at the forthcoming conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, narrated by St John: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son: that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting*" (Jn 3:14-16). The series does not hide that the sacrifice of the Cross looms ahead. In fact, even after having watched only two seasons out of seven, one senses the slow but dramatic build-up of opposition between light and darkness, which will culminate at the Crucifixion.

Reservations

Is it to say that *The Chosen* can be watched without any reservations? No. The actress playing Our Lady

lacks depth. She comes across as efficient and extravert, lacking the recollection and humble quiet that should have characterised her; unlike the actress playing St Mary Magdalene who would have been a much better cast for the Mother of God. Furthermore, a short bonus episode describes her childbirth at the Nativity as painful, in opposition with the dogma of the virginal birth. Franco Zeffirelli's acclaimed *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) committed the same mistake, even though by allusion only. Less substantially, why do men's tunics, including Our Lord's, end at knee-length? That depiction of biblical garments is alien to classical paintings, and to earlier films for that matter. Theologically, the process of redaction of the Gospels seems a bit too collective, showing some apostles taking notes like reporters

covering an event. Finally, viewers with little or no knowledge of the Gospels may hold as genuine anecdotes and characters which are merely fictional.

Emulate

Overall, I think that most Catholics (and non-Catholics) can draw a lot of good from watching *The Chosen*. The main benefit of the series is to load our memory with detailed and respectful scenes of the Gospels, fostering spiritual intimacy with Our Lord and his followers. This should obviously not replace the inspired Gospels but rather invite one to know them better. If any dissonance occurs, it can be a good opportunity to check what the text actually says, and how Holy Church understands it. No doubt other Catholics, including clerics, may feel differently. With them I do recommend prudence in the choice

of entertainment and of spiritual material in general. I think this compatible with a fruitful watching of *The Chosen*, though, and I look forward to Season 3 and further ones. Let us pray that this Christian film may inspire solid Catholics to become involved in their turn in film design and production, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

For further inquiry, I recommend the series of three nuanced and overall supportive articles written by Fr Paul Roy, FSSP for *claves.org*, an official website of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter in France. Fr Roy comments at length on the three seasons of *The Chosen* already released out of seven. Simply type *The Chosen* in the Search box. The French original is quickly and reliably translated via Google Translate. □

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Refugees Find A Home In Catholic Tradition

By a Hong Kong Catholic immigrated to England

The 2019 Protests caused major political changes in Hong Kong. At first it seemed to have little impact on ordinary families like mine. But I later found that I was mistaken. I realised that life and beliefs had undergone great changes and were subjected to deep fears. In July 2020 the UK announced that British National Overseas visas (i.e. BNO) would allow Hong Kong people holding BNO passports to apply for immigrating to the UK. We suddenly felt hopeful. But how could we implement that option? We didn't have any relatives or friends in the UK. And that country is so big compared with the Hong Kong enclave: how could we select a location? Thus our family of four, including two daughters who were 8 and 11 years old at the time, felt really hesitant. We knew that we lacked guidance and had to rely on God. We started to pray for this intention, spending half a year in continuously prayer, begging God to direct our family. At that time, our most urgent petition to God was to let us find a house in England. It had to be located close to a Catholic church and school. In Hong Kong our local church was really our home. Leaving it behind felt very difficult, having spent so many years there. Reflecting that God was our sole secured possession as long as we lived, I reminded my wife and daughters that in the Bible story St. Joseph took the Baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary to Egypt together. I

believe it was more difficult than now, surely. But Jesus also said, *Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat: and the body more than the raiment? Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they?* (Mt 6:25-26).

With this assurance given to us by God, we finally decided to go to UK at the end of December 2020. Our wish was to leave only after attending the Christmas Mass. In addition to the necessary clothes and supplies in the luggage, we also brought a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to accompany us. On the plane, we kept praying the Rosary until landed. On arriving in the UK our destination was Warrington. The weather was very cold and snowing. Once at the hotel, I went out to find the church on the second day. In addition, the Covid pandemic was widespread and the UK was still under lockdown. Many churches seemed to be closed. After a few months I went to several churches and finally found St Mary's Shrine Church. This is a church that only has the traditional Latin Mass. We had never participated in the traditional Mass in

Hong Kong. When we first came to St. Mary's Shrine Church, it was not at all what we were used to. We didn't know what the priest was doing at the altar, and my English is limited. Later, I started to look for more information on the Internet, and then I got acquainted with the traditional Mass. I have even fallen in love with it. I understand that everything I get is God. It is a gift, so now I go to church every day to thank God for leading us to find this church and to know and participate in the traditional Mass. Now we have found a house that is very close to that church, and we have found a Catholic school for our daughters. Thanks be to God. Praise be to God, and may we dedicate to God the rest of our lives, because all of these are gifts from God. □



Young Catholics Mourn Cardinal George Pell

By Juventem International Federation

Among many who mourn His Eminence George Cardinal Pell, passed away on 10th January 2023, are the young adults of the *Juventem International Federation*.

Cardinal Pell had been the first prelate to preside at liturgical ceremonies in the traditional liturgy at World Youth Day. This took place in Düsseldorf, Germany on 7th August 2005, when His Eminence celebrated pontifical Vespers in the vast Church of St Antonius packed with hundreds of young Catholics. For the first time ever, the traditional liturgy was part of the official programme of World Youth Day. After Vespers in Düsseldorf, Cardinal Pell gave the following encouragements to the young WYD pilgrims of *Juventem*:

“I am happy to be here because the old Latin rite is one of the most beautiful things in the entire Western civilization. And I am very glad that this ancient rite has its place in the Church today. I am happy because this rite helps you to love God and to love one another. In this ancient rite we always see that our prayer is an act of worship. It is impossible to see a celebration like these Vespers as something horizontal. We have one Church only, whose Head is the Successor of Peter, with the Bishops as successors of the Apostles, and this unity is very important for the life of the Church.”

Three years later in his own city of Sydney, despite being so busy as host to WYD, Cardinal Pell again celebrated pontifical vespers and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament for *Juventem* on 16th July 2008.

He had agreed to offer Holy Mass for *Juventem* on two further occasions but had to cancel for health and later for business reasons. The first time was scheduled in Rome on Friday 24th October 2014 in thanksgiving for the tenth anniversary of *Juventem*. The second time was at WYD 2016 in Krakow. His Eminence wrote:

“Dear young Catholics of the *Juventem* youth movement, I prayed for you and all the young adults gathered around Pope Francis last week in Krakow for the World Youth Day. As you know, urgent business at the Vatican prevented me from coming to Poland to deliver one of the official catecheses and to offer Holy Mass in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite for your group. However, I am



(Picture above: www.facebook.com/lmsaus.org; left: Cardinal Zen offers traditional Mass in Hong Kong on 4.7.2012 - newliturgicalmovement.org/)

pleased to hear that six of my fellow bishops accompanied you. As you travel to your home countries, be assured of my prayer for all WYD participants. May you all help spread God's mercy, with conviction and joy.

Signed: George Cardinal Pell, Prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, 2nd August 2016.”

May he rest in peace. □

Art: Claude Lorrain's *Seaport by Sunset*

Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP comments on a painting by Claude Lorrain, 1639, from Le Louvre, Paris

Soon it will be dark. *When, then? When will we be taken onboard?* Such is probably what this family wonders in the bottom-left corner of the painting. Sitting on their luggage, the maiden listens to her fiancé playing the luth, while the wife holds her child struck by the shrieks of seagulls gliding

across the salty breeze. It is nearly sunset and the lady's husband with the maiden's brother, standing closer to the shore, are still negotiating the fare with this Turk, identified by his turban. Unless, to spend time, they are buying a pipe from those the Muslim carries in his shoulder bag. Either way, they would not be

waiting on the beach with a pile of trunks and their stranded family if they were not hoping to embark before dark. Meanwhile, the child feels safe in his mother's arm, despite the brawl taking place further to the right, in the middle of the picture. Two hatted officers are about to intervene, the red-caped



one unsheathing his sword to enforce order. Behind them, a young man shields his eyes from the bright sun with his hat. Pointing at a man facing him on a bark, he is possibly enquiring about being ferried onto one of the large ships anchored to the far right.

Those ships are connected, literally, to the far left of the picture. If we follow the thick ropes falling from the left-facing prow, we find the end of one emerging from the water at the far-left end of the shore, where a bent sailor is tying it around a mooring post. The immersed rope draws a curve subtly separating the human characters on the beach from the action taking place on the water. The curve pattern extends further to the left behind the half-kneeling man, as delineated by the neat circular line between water and sand. Further back, the smaller boats and the quay in cut stone narrow the perspective, in symmetry with the two large ships to the right, on the opposite side of the painting. The overall impression conveyed is therefore that of a vast round liquid stage, a nearly closed watery platform around which the characters on the shore and quays are disseminated like an audience watching some performance.

What spectacle are they attending? Time. The passing of time is the show taking place. Unbeknownst to many, the spectators are part of the show—whose star is none other than the sun itself. See how the setting star upon the horizon, casting its golden rays all across the waters and unto the shore and eyes of the characters, brings life to the entire scene. It feels as if its dazzling ray mirrored upon the waves was the hand of a clock slowly moving across the liquid circle, or indeed



(Pictures commons.wikimedia.org - public domain)

like the *gnomon*, that pointy bit of a sundial that casts the shadow. The entire harbour can be read as a metaphor of the passing of time. This suggestion is corroborated by the actual clock displayed on the pinnacle of the main building to the far-left. At first sight it seemed inconspicuous, merely showing as one among many architectural items in Claude's palatial phantasy, a feast for our eyes! We were so much taken in by the skilful succession of surprises, from the majestic balcony and monumental columns of the first building to the elegant four stone pavilions crowning the mansion behind (like a *Blenheim Palace-on-Sea*), across a side wharf and steps, to this vertiginous and thin lighthouse in the middle (how do they manage to carry wood up to that lantern on the top?), concluding

with the face-to-face of the two larger towers closing the harbour on either side—that we nearly missed that *clock*. The perspective distorts its round shape into an ellipse. But we can read its numbers still, spaced out all around the circumference of the dial whose long hand shows 6:10pm. Above it, a smaller disc appears, framed in stone: probably the coat of arms of the family owning that mansion. Visually, their juxtaposition merely looks a smaller circle overhanging a wider one. The smaller one above shows neither hand nor figures, but the larger one below does. Does it perhaps remind us of a similar configuration? Can we identify on the painting another smaller disc, clear of any hand or figures, echoed by a much larger disc below it, that one equipped with

a long hand and surrounded with many figures indeed?

Yes, so does the setting sun look above the vast ellipse of the beach. We recall the sunray reaching successively the various characters watching on the sand like numerical figures on the circumference of a dial. Well, what a stunning perspective this analogy of shapes offers... Could it be refined through additional similarities? If the architectural dial of stone and metal projects meaning unto the natural dial of water and light, could it be that *stone* figures surround the former, as *human* ones do the latter? Right at the top indeed, their little legs dangling in the air, two statues of children sit on either side of the smaller disc (the coat of arms), right above the larger disc (the actual clock). The legs intersect the

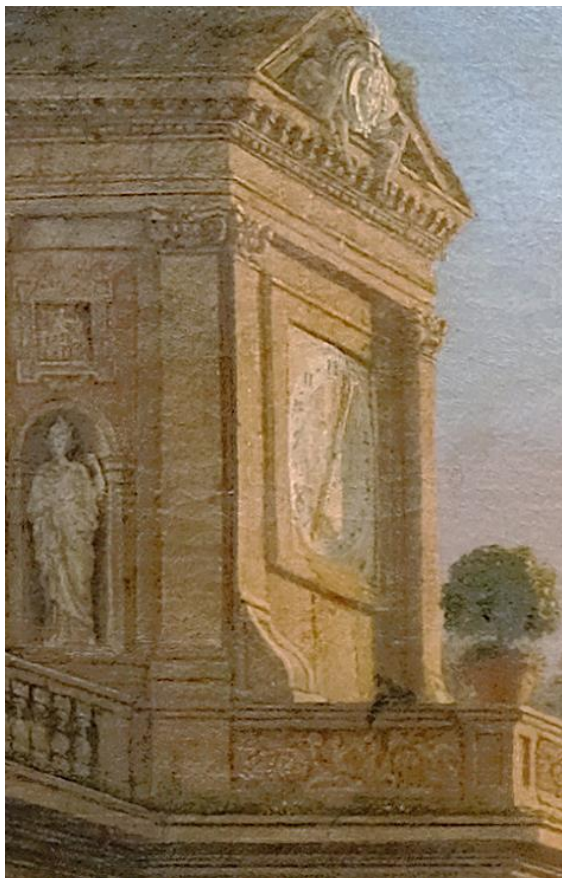
conspicuous stone coving like amidst the harbour a ship does the horizon, connecting sun and sea. In a vertical niche to the left of the clock, a tall statue stands, probably a pagan deity such as Minerva, her head covered with a helmet. Right above her, several smaller characters show within a square frame. Similarly, carved reliefs of children at play are displayed on the balustrade along the terrace. At the bottom left, that is, at ground level, another gigantic statue, three times larger than life, stands in a niche. Thus, we now realise, a semi-circle of stone figures surrounds the clock: above, left and below it. They echo the natural sundial, and prepare us to recognise that all in this painting gravitates around the sun.

That sun is God, symbolically, who once whispered about human hearts:

I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love (Hos 11:14). Designing every creature, great and small, as a fragmentary reflection of his infinite perfections, God created the material universe as a love letter to men. Claude's *Seaport by Sunset* depicts the beauty of God's creation (expansive sky, sun, sea), to which man harmoniously collaborates (building harbours, mansions, ships). Since ports are by definition places of passage, this painting also evokes the passing of time,

the meaning of human activity, and the prospect of eternity. The faraway destination where our stranded family, down there in the bottom-left corner of the oval beach, expects to be ferried, is the afterlife. Every spectator can identify with them, as with all other figures scattered along our existential sundial. Like the hand of a luminous clock, the sunray slowly moves across the turquoise waves, down from the gilded horizon, unto the shore where it reaches its human beholder: maiden, lad, mother, child, father, merchant, rogue, official, rich and poor, old and young, Christian and heathen.

Symbolically again, here light means *grace*: that gratuitous sharing in his very life offered by God to rational creatures, men and angels. On this picture, light suffuses every tower and window, every ripple and cloud, every bird and human. None but the latter, though, are endowed with a soul enabling them to understand and welcome divine grace. It takes reflecting on this visitation of our mind's eyes by the divine *sun*. Will we turn our back on it, like the maiden enthralled by the tunes of a serenade? Will we merely keep it in the background, like the mother anxious to find out when her boat will carry her to safety with her child, securing for her progeny a bright future on earth? Behind the edge of the dark gentleman's black hat, will we shield our eyes from it as if dazzled by the truth? Or like the gentleman bargaining with the Turk, will we ignore it, the better to go about our business, betting that our silver coins will retain currency once, across the sea, we will have disembarked? Like the officer unsheathing his sword, will we readily account for our daily use under the sun of the authority entrusted to us in the service of the





community? Or finally, like the lowly seamen to the right, working hard under the scorching glare to ferry barrels of precious liquor, a single pint of which is worth one month of their wages, will we declare ourselves too busy, tired and deprived to give thanks for such light? Grace comes to us all in the course of our lives. The question is: will we care to respond?

No priest stands on that symbolic bank of life's reckoning, did you notice?—no professed atheist or enlightened liberal either. Those came long after Claude in his turn had crossed the sea and bathed in the Sun of Justice, Christ the Lord. While Claude painted such *Seaports by Sunset*, in the seventeenth century, man sinned and yet, none had drunk so much liquor as to proclaim, *There is no sun!* The masters of suspicion had not yet persuaded the world of God's death, of man's amorality and of the imposture of harbours. Not yet had evolution melted our kneecaps,

forbidding genuflections before our Maker, Saviour and Judge. Not yet had man started drifting away, like a drunken boat, from the safe shores of virtue. Not yet had we been grounded, forbidden heaven, lured into fishtraps they called *harbours*, fatal havens where all should swarm and dwell but which none may ever leave alive, whence no man was ever to spring, fly and seek alien coves, delusory heavens—they taught.

We came after. No wonder it is more difficult for us to read a painting like this one. It speaks of life, truth, grace and light, none of which carries a price tag. We simply don't know what to make of it. We wonder whether the subtle network of signification hinted at truly conveys as much meaning, or even more, than our optic fibres and our plasma screens. Stemming from the ship decks, can the numerous masts stand as so many *antennas*, intercepting communications of vital interest and translating energy into

intelligible truths? Flowing from the gilded horizon, are those turquoise waves *electromagnetic*, carrying to shore critical signals? Along the stately quay, do the imposing towers, the triumphant lighthouse and the reliable clock vibrate, unseen by untrained eyes, like potent *reflectors* of messages from yonder eternal?

If a painter like Claude expresses some of God's benevolent design toward mankind—as he does—then our joy is genuine as we look at the world as a divine painting, a canvas helping us men to learn and dwell, serve, grow and be saved by *he that stretcheth out the heavens as nothing, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in* (Is 40:22). May this image and similar ones unfold before our mind like the sails unfurl in Claude's painted harbour, catching the divine breeze that propels ship and crew, heart and soul, toward the blissful embrace of the rising Sun. □

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(Picture: Congratulations to newly betrothed Henry Walker and Lucienne Cotton. Pray for them and for many more!)



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