

**ST GEORGE'S WINDSOR**  
**LENT 1 2022**

**You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.** The words are those heard by Jesus at his Baptism. **You are my Son, the Beloved....** We are so used to hearing those words that we often fail to register their full impact. At his Baptism, Jesus heard the reassuring words that he was 'Beloved'. He was aware of his call to surrender to, to abandon himself to, the love of God; to be henceforth inspired, shaped and directed by that love alone. **You are my Son, the Beloved....**

And immediately, so we heard in today's reading from St Luke's Gospel, he was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He was, so we are told, tempted three times. I shall not dwell on those temptations here except to say that each one, in its own way, was a temptation to lose confidence in the love of God; a temptation to trust in something other than God's love; a temptation to renege on the promise that, at his Baptism, Jesus had been called to make.

Having that very much in mind, let us turn for a while to the present situation in our all too troubled world.

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As was no doubt the case with many of you, I watched on the television news the other day young men digging trenches in Kyiv. I was reminded of many iconic pictures of the First World War, and felt horror at the fact that this should now be the scene in Europe more than a hundred years later.

At the same time, my thoughts went to a very short poem by Ivor Gurney; a poem called *Song and Pain* published in 1917 in a volume titled *Severn and Somme*. The first line of the poem expresses the almost mysterious conviction of Gurney that: "Out of my sorrow have I made these songs."

Gurney, better known perhaps as a composer of songs than as a poet, had, not long before, arrived at the Royal College of Music, having been examined by Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Charles Stanford, Dr Walford Davies and Dr Charles Wood. However, on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, just before Gurney's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, peace in Europe was shattered, and the First World War began. Like so many young men, Ivor Gurney volunteered for military service. Because of his poor eyesight, he was turned down. By February 1915 however, things were desperate. He was accepted, and arrived in France in May 1916. There he stayed, caught up in the conflict, until the end of 1917, reading, writing letters, making poems and composing music until, having been wounded and then gassed, he was shipped home to England. Against this background, we read a poem that expresses an almost mysterious conviction: "Out of my sorrow have I made these songs."

By the end of 1922, Gurney, now psychologically very fragile, had been committed to The City of London Mental Hospital at Dartford, where he was to remain until his death, from tuberculosis, fifteen years later, in 1937. These were dark years, but the darkness was lightened by visits from friends. One who came to visit him was Helen Thomas, widow of the poet Edward Thomas who had been killed at the Battle of Arras, on Easter Monday 1917.

Years later in 1960, Helen Thomas wrote of a visit she had made to the mental hospital. She felt the place to be like a prison, and Ivor Gurney's room to be like a cell. He was frighteningly deluded but later took her into a large room. Helen Thomas writes: In the room was "a piano and on this he played to us and the tragic circle of men who sat on hard benches against the walls of the room. Hopeless and aimless faces gazed vacantly and restless hands fumbled or hung down lifelessly. They gave no sign or sound that they heard the music." Yet, out of that kind of hell, music had been played. It is a very powerful image. There is a hint of mystery here. "Out of my sorrow have I made these songs."

The poetry and the music of Ivor Gurney somehow convey a sense that darkness will not prevail. In his little eight line poem, composed in the midst of the tragedies of the First World War, Gurney writes:

Some day, I trust, God's purpose of pain for me  
Shall be complete,  
And then – to enter in the House of Joy ....  
Prepare my feet.

It is as though he is clinging to the conviction that there must be some purpose and pattern to things, and that even pain will somehow be woven into something wonderful.

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Perhaps, during these last days, we have seen just a hint of, a glimmer of that miracle; that mystery. We have witnessed an overwhelming wave of compassion and kindness and of determination that we shall not be cowed by aggression. Though we cannot see quite what the future holds, it seems that many people, of acknowledged religious conviction or none, are at least holding fast to some threads of the faith that Jesus in the wilderness refused to abandon; faith that love and love alone (for us of course, the love of God) is this world's destiny. The music of humanity is being played. "Out of my sorrow have I made these songs."

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Be that as it may, of course our faith is challenged. We find ourselves in the wilderness; bewildered and afraid. We are perplexed. We are angry that life is what it has turned out to be. It is at such a time as this that we must pray most earnestly to be inspired, shaped and directed by the vision of God's love for His world. Without such a vision, such a hope, humanity is profoundly impoverished.

This will be of course not just a matter of words. We must seek and welcome ways of being in solidarity with our oppressed sisters and brothers, whether in Ukraine or Russia, sharing at least something of their sorrow, and shouldering at least something of the weight they bear, not least their economic burden.

This year's Lenten observation for us will not be a matter of limiting chocolate bars or alcoholic consumption. We shall not trivialise the season. It is a time to stand with Jesus Christ in the wilderness; a time to resist all those forces that work to undermine our (so we believe) God-given faith, and, for the sake of the world, to go on believing that it will one day be sung: "Out of my sorrows have I made these songs."