

A Reflection from a St Mary's Churchwarden (Charles Wilson)

I don't very often have a rant. But I got a bit upset the other day, and had a rant about something rather minor with the Diocesan Historic Buildings team. Sometimes the bureaucratic system which operates for maintaining Grade 1 Listed Buildings is very picky - and therefore annoying! It's done to prevent 'cowboys' trashing our heritage. We just got on with minor works like repairing gutters - as required in our Church Architect's five year Inspection - but unfortunately, we did so *before* certain forms were filled in, and certain boxes *ticked*, rather than afterwards. Oh dear. So as Churchwarden, I unknowingly fell short of the standard required. I missed the mark. And that's called "sin"! *Mea culpa*.

Happily the Diocesan team responded graciously, and have now agreed to assist future ignoramuses like me with some timely advice, so that others don't make the same mistake. But it made me think about Jesus' rants....they were far worse than mine, or even Donald Trump's!

Interestingly, Jesus reserved his choicest abuse for the clerical establishment. It's tempting to immediately think 'Bishop' or 'Diocese' at this point, but actually he was challenging their heart attitudes, i.e. those who think themselves righteous but whose actions don't match up. See Matthew chapter 23. My rant was mild by comparison to what Jesus said. He gives an absolute tirade against the clerics and lawyers of the day. He really could not have been more offensive: "YOU hypocrites, children of hell, blind guides, wicked murderers, whitewashed tombs, snakes, brood of vipers" and so on. Jesus absolutely hated external whitewash, covering up internally bad or proud attitudes.

So with Lent approaching shortly, it's a good time for me to reflect on my heart attitudes, as 'out of the heart, the mouth speaks'. Fr Keith is duty-bound, I guess, to focus us all on such things as soon as he arrives, a tough first assignment when he's only just met us!

Of course, being a cleric, or lawyer, or dressing up in robes at Fr Keith's Institution & Induction on 26th February does not necessarily imply the lack of virtue that Jesus deprecated so much. But those carrying that responsibility are judged more harshly by God, so I think it's *our job* to be doubly nice to Keith and others in spiritual leadership! St Paul calls it 'double honour' (1 Timothy 5); especially when you see Keith's dog, Ted, doing something he shouldn't...well, doing it in the wrong place, anyway.

By the way, calling someone "Father X" is an unfamiliar mode of address for me. So I asked Keith, about this. He said "I really don't mind what you call me, as long as it's not rude!" It's particularly helpful for the schoolchildren as it's quite a neat way of giving respect to his office as Rector, yet keeping the friendliness of a first name. Good point!

I might even change the habit of a lifetime, who knows?