

There are three things I want to talk about today.

First of all, holy icons – not the things that appear on your computer screen, but something a bit like one of these(holds up icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour), a picture that leads us into the divine, into an experience of transcendence. Two weeks from now, we are going to have a display of holy icons here in this church. Make sure you come and pray with them, and come and meet the Greek Orthodox priest who is going to talk to us on the Sunday evening.

Second, I want to recommend Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'*, his encyclical on the environment. Do buy a copy and read it and pray about it.

For my third thing, I have no visual aids at all, but it's a story that has barely been off the front pages of the newspapers all summer – refugees, migrants, the Jungle at Calais, men women and children dying in the Mediterranean, and fences of barbed wire going up around the borders of Europe.

'Start crying', says St James, *'weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is all rotting, your clothes are all eaten up by moths. All your gold and silver are corroding away.'* We, as individuals, cannot take personal responsibility for the injustices of our world. We cannot take personal responsibility for the wars inflicted upon Iraq and Afghanistan, for the bombs inflicted upon Libya, or for the arms sold to the highest bidder. But at the end of the day this is something that is being done in our name, by governments elected by the British people. *'In the time of slaughter we did indeed go on eating to our hearts content'*.

For Pope Francis, problems of injustice, violence and environmental degradation are all one and the same – a misuse, a misunderstanding of what the world is. It's not just a matter of polluting a planet, or running out of resources, it's about using our planet for our own selfish ends, treating our planet as a mere thing which is totally at **our** disposal.

Back to our display of Holy Icons in a fortnight's time. At the end of each day of creation, God looked and gazed at his creation in wonderment and love and declared it to be *'very good'*. The world is not just a thing that happens to be there. The world, the universe is supposed to be a holy icon, a window into heaven, a window into God. We human beings have been created not to dominate and subjugate it and abuse it, but to care for it and look after it, and, as the holy priesthood that we are, to offer it back to God in worship and praise, in love and service.

Jesus doesn't of course want us to take literally his injunction to tear out one of our eyes if it causes us to sin. But he does want us to be totally uncompromising in the way we use our eyes. God has given us our eyes in order to see him, to have a vision of the transcendent. When we look and gaze at one another and the world around us, we are not to see something we can take advantage of, what we should see and what we should train ourselves to see is the beauty and the love of God, the creator and redeemer of everything there is. *Laudato si', mi' Signore*, Praise be to you, my Lord.

Fr Michael