Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew *it* not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven. +

You may not be aware of it but this week has been a big week for anniversaries here at Pusey. Wednesday was the 90th anniversary of the Dedication of the altar, and Baldacchino, and East Window in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel behind me. Friday was the anniversary of the Dedication of the House per se, and Saturday the anniversary of the Dedication of all its buildings - all marked by services which began with everyone reciting together, "O. How dreadful is this place". Which more than one of us thought expressed something of the mixed feelings Pusey House might inspire. Nonetheless they all offered a good opportunity to remember - a century on, and more - that those who gave their time, energy, and money to establish 'this place' were not thinking about themselves, or their children, but about us. Strangers in generations to come. This is nothing new of course - they were only able to have those particular thoughts about the inheritance of the future, because God's people have obeyed, however imperfectly, the instruction from last week's lessons to diligently teach what they have been taught - to write God's words on the doorposts of their houses. We are here because they, all of them, have sought to lift us up as an offering, and in love have preferred us…

As it happens this week has also seen a visit to the House of a consultant whose task is to help *us* think about the next few centuries and those whom it is our responsibility, in turn, to lift up as an offering, preferring *them* in love… We have been directing our attention to securing the inheritance of this place "for our descendants after us for the generations to follow…"

But that requires that we ask ourselves a few fundamental questions. The very questions, indeed, that our consultant expensively articulated on Tuesday. What is the inheritance and peculiar treasure of this Household? Why did those benefactors of a century and more ago seek to secure it for the centuries ahead. What is Pusey House for? And why should it continue another *day* let alone another 100,000 days and more?

Well, one answer to that question lies in what our House *Prayer* calls 'contending earnestly for the truth of the incarnation', and indeed is present in the readings we have heard this morning, but simply put it might be something like this:

We are here - Pusey House is here - at least in part - because Pusey and Keble and Newman-and-all had a particular understanding of the thing that is central to the Christian Manifesto - the thing represented in the parable of the prodigal son, as emblematic of the repentance and restoration the Gospel preaches. The need to come to our senses.

The Prodigal indulged his sensory appetites until he had reduced himself to a beast in a field, but then, says Luke, 'he came to his senses'. Literally, he came into himself.

All Christian life is rooted in the moment and the process of 'coming to our senses' - in choosing to return to the one from whom we _took_ our life, in order to _receive_ and offer our life anew. But for the Tractarians, whose legacy is _our_ inheritance - there was a growing realisation that 'coming to our senses' is not just a phrase to describe the converting instant of recognition, not simply a continual return to that moment as we forget, again and again, who we really are, and are recalled, again and again, by God's grace to repent…

But in _being_ those things, it is the willed reversal of the sclerosis of our senses which St Paul describes in our Epistle - choosing to participate in that work of the Incarnation - what Keble called 'deifying discipline' - which removes the callouses and cataracts over our hearts and eyes (that have left us - without our even realising it - past feeling), and replaces them with the enlivened sensitivity of the new humans.

It is cultivating a new sensibility. That, I would suggest, is why we are here. We have come, wittingly or otherwise, to learn a new way of employing our senses, to have forged in us a new SENSIBILITY in which "the material reality of creation as a whole becomes a monstrance of Gods real presence".

This is the sacramental project which Dr Pusey and his fellows were FEELING their way toward - not least through their changed view of reading scripture, as "an expression of a way of understanding the relationship of the created order to God."

Yet this renewing of our human sensibility - this attempt not to ignore, or deny, or just get _past_, our bodily senses, but to see them taken up & transformed by the spirit into the media of our encounter with Love Himsef - this is not a Tractarian invention. It is blossoming in Origen and Bernard of Clairvaux, it is already full blown in that phrase of Aquinas we sing each week - 'faith our outward sense _befriending_ makes the inward vision clear' - but it's _roots_ are in Eden…

What after all are the senses for? Evolutionary biology will tell us they are first and foremost for survival - of course - to detect danger, to find food, to navigate the precarious line that leads to living a bit longer than we might otherwise have done. But the story Eden tells is different - by its account the human senses are not the product of brute necessity - they are not primarily for escaping death, they are for embracing life - they were given as the way we, and so all things, might commune with God. As the means of grace. The medium of love received and expressed. And the truth of the Incarnation, that Dr Pusey was so keen to contend for, is precisely one of humanity coming back to its _original_ senses.

And if this is lies at the heart of Tractarian teaching and practice - of catholic worship; if this 'renewing of sensibility' is at the centre of Pusey's legacy, and of the sacramental approach to scripture, liturgy, and community in this House - it's because it is the _theme_ of the New Testament Epistles - like ours today, and writ large in the twin renewals of our Gospel: of the man - of humanity - palsied in body and soul.

Because coming back to our senses is about regeneration - about regenesis - it is about our fallen estrangement from the source of all the stuff of our world - and so it is about the remission of sins and the return *to* that source. The Incarnation is the project of Restored Physicality, and so the Incarnate One spends much of his time doing what we see him do today - restoring to bodies their palsied sensitivity - healing lepers and opening blind eyes. He certainly does *not* say - 'you are *lucky* to be blind or numb, because your outward senses prevent you from perceiving inwardly'.

But he does in our Gospel today make clear that he is equally not concerned with merely giving back lost organs or objects in a corrupt system - with sewing new patches on old garments, but rather *with* regeneration, with reformed *subjects*; with remission of the sin that cut us off from feeling and cast us into sclerotic **sensuality. His purpose is reconnection to the font of life and love, and with beginning to learn a new way of living in our body, and as the final form of embodied human being we are called to.**

This is what 'Son your Sins are Forgiven' means. No longer *being* alienated from the life of God. No longer *being* past feeling. Now able to get up and walk, not as Gentiles do, but as those learning the new functions and appetites of the body of Christ. Because this new sensibility, this renewed bodily identity, that final form of human being, is not simply an individual one - me or you *having* a different body - it is unequivocally a corporate one - us, all of us, *being* a different body.

The trouble is - the reason *discipline* is needed, *is* - that this coming to our senses requires 'putting off the old man': and so we have to contend with our natural bodily instincts, what Paul calls the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in how we *think* about…pretty much everything. Because our instinctive responses are not ordered to love of God and neighbour - they are ordered viscerally and unconsciously towards self preservation and self promotion. And what is worse the craft and subtlety of sin is such that it doesn't need to be the opposite of the good to keep us from shrugging off the body of death, it doesn't need to be a million miles from the truth, it only needs to *end up* wide of the mark. It only needs to start its trajectory a whisker wide and without correction it will whistle past the target as it had never been fired…

This is why the whisper of temptation sounds so much *like* the call of love. It imitates as it inverts, like a mirror facing us in wrong direction, and the truth "you shall be made in the God's likeness" becomes the lie "you shall be like Gods". But let's come back to that. *First* - if we are here to be brought back to our senses. And if this process of deifying discipline - of putting off the old self - is why this place exists. Then what are the temptations that subvert that process *in 'this* place'. If our peculiar treasures lie in *the sacramental project 'of restored physicality as the Body of Christ',* then what are our particular vulnerabilities, *our* besetting sins? Or in case the list is too long to think clearly about it in one homily, which of the traits in St Paul's catalogue of ways the old self is to be put off, and the new man put on, seem of particular import in a place like this?

Are we more prone than any community to lying or theft? To sinning in our anger? Or more than usually inclined to laziness or boisterousness?
If I asked our Jewish Development Consultant, who has just begun to learn something about Anglo Catholicism from without, to identify not just the treasures of this part of the Church, but its besetting sins. What would *she* observe? She might have reason to identify a self-indulgent sensuality of the kind that is less frequently or less obviously a challenge for our Puritan brethren, a fondness for too much alcohol, or a fetish for soft raiment…but I wonder how long it would take her to notice - because *we* foster close community, but our old instincts remain intact, we are gossips; because *we* feel strongly about holiness and hierarchy but our old instincts remain, we are prone to criticism, and we suffer the temptation to lift ourselves up by putting others down, when we ought to be lifting others up, and esteeming them superior to ourselves.

Again - no Christian, no human being, is immune to these things - they are part of the old self we must all put off, but this kind of corrupt communication and unedifying speech are particular 'poisonous tares' that grows amidst the new sensibility this place exists to cultivate, and push through the cracks of the ways we pave towards it.

So St Paul says "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying" and none of us will disagree, but how good are we at controlling our speech in the conversations we imagine to be private. When was the last time you took an audit of what you have said in the last 24 hours and asked yourself what was judgmental, what was derisory or demeaning, what was building the false intimacy of secrets not ours to share, or laughter at a third party's expense? All this is a normal part of human conversation. But it is a normal part of the former conversation, because it is all - all of it - ordered towards self promotion in putting down another, and self preservation in seeking to build the bond of unity in *this* group, by defining ourselves over against that other.

All of it is as easy and enticing as sweets are to children, and all of it - every mouthful - as decaying to *our* souls as sugar is to *their* teeth. 'Corrupting' as Paul says - part of what will continue to palsy our sensibility, even as the Holy Spirit of God seeks to regenerate it, and grieves when we undermine of our own healing.

So what might constitute the kind of deifying discipline we need, to learn how we can live according to pattern of the new man, not in the deep worn grooves of the old? How can we reconfigure our real hunger and thirst to be more than mere animal appetite? how can we recast our actual sexual desire to be more than the will to power, or the peacock strut of selfish genes? how can we recalibrate our 5 bodily senses so that we *live* 'eucharistically' - instinctively giving thanks to *God*, *for* the kindness we receive *from* others, and *in* the kindness we extend *to* them? *How* we can tame the tongue so we are steered towards the kingdom of God and not onto the rocks of our deceitful instincts?

Fr George will speak more to particular disciplines next week, but the beginning is always the same - in penitence and sought forgiveness - to hear again and again "your sins are forgiven you" and to sift those very gifts particularly bestowed upon, for the temptations that might shift our course just enough to shipwreck us. Perhaps we can conclude with one tangible example - of shipwreck in fact - using the image kindly tucked in your Pew Sheets…



We have said that this form of Christian worship is deliberately hierarchical. In a Dionysian sense - to make explicit the divinely authored connection between every layer of creation, the crucial and intentional part all of material life was designed to play in God's economy; and in a Dantean sense - to point to that ascension by which the whole corpus of the *physical* realm is made to be lifted up in love.

From the baptismal waters, or the west door, to the altar of self-offering love, in gradual ascent, and the constantly gathering movement that would scoop up every fragment that nothing be lost - our liturgical hierarchy represents that process by which, in love, each lifts each, as every one is raised up in and by *the* One, whose own lifting up draws all things into reconciliation.

In theory - if you painted the scene it would look like a kind of golden triangle, with Christ self-offered at its pinnacle, and all of us in his train, not dragged up behind him, but actively lifting him up in offering ourselves, and in seeking to lift up each other like a team of enthusiastic gymnasts cooperating to build a human pyramid. The people in the nave lifting the torch bearers, who are lifting their *torches, and* the servers, who themselves lift the sacred ministers, who lift the one whose whole body is lifted up as a Living Sacrifice. Glorious. And every lifted one of us, like Him, turning back also to reach down and draw up with us, all who have placed themselves at our feet, or who might be left behind…

But. Our old instincts remain, and old self perpetually seeks another kind of hierarchy - more like the one Gericault famously painted of the handful of survivors from the shipwrecked Medusa. Desperate to preserve themselves each scrambles over other to reach the top and safety, the strong stepping on the weak to gain a higher status, the weakest sliding off the base of this pyramid which slaves to death reflexively build, *their* arms not reaching down to rescue, but lifeless limp and pointing back to chaos and 'the waters'.

The hierarchy of love is the opposite of this survival of the fittest. But at a glance - like a reflection - it looks exactly the same. Because the vital difference lies in the disposition of the heart. Of our hearts. In any given moment…

Arguably - of *all* the forms of Christian worship ours is the one that can least afford to indulge in unedifying speech, or criticism of the other, in subtle ambition, or the preservation or promotion of self.

So if we are to be faithful to our inheritance - to those in previous centuries who sought to lift us up as an offering, and in love preferred us…we must be seeking to do the same - not symbolically while the old self continues quietly unchanged - but sacramentally, actually, putting off the former conversation - lifting one another up, preferring one another in love, and laying our selves down, so that in the centuries to come people *might* say - how dreadful is this place - and *mean*: this is the House of God and the gate of Heaven. +