



THOUGHTS FOR PASSION SUNDAY
LENT 5
21 MARCH 2021

Census Day
John 12:20-33

Today is Passion Sunday, when our more general Lenten thoughts turn traditionally to focus on Jesus' passion, as we journey with him in thought through all the events leading up to his crucifixion.

This year it is also Census day. I am one of those people who love completing questionnaires and surveys, so the census is something of a treat for me! Gareth is not so keen, but I did manage to persuade him to sit down with me at the computer and complete the task on-line this time. I have a friend who is very opposed to the census. He completes it only because he is compelled by the law to do so, but he regards it as an intrusion into his privacy, and he feels that it is unwarranted state interference. The famous census that dragged Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary to Bethlehem could, I acknowledge, be seen in a repressive light, being ordered by an occupying power not noted for its cherishing of conquered peoples, but, apart from my interest in surveys, I see the British census as a tool for more effective state planning in a much more constructive and positive way.

A full page advertisement in the *Metro* newspaper (and it may have appeared in others) caught my attention. "If you're not Religious, SAY SO! Tick 'No religion' in the 2021 Census" screams the headline. The advertising campaign is being run by Humanists UK, and I agree with them entirely that someone completing the census who does not feel themselves to be religious to declare that, which is particularly easy to do this time as 'No Religion' is the first option on that section of the form. Where I part company with Humanists UK is when they go on to say that the UK Census uses leading questions which presume that everybody has a religion. That may have been true in past censuses, I cannot remember, but really does not appear to be the case this time. The advertisement goes on to say that people 'may tick the religion they were baptised in, of their parents or of the faith school they attended', well, they may, but that is up to them. Having heard a representative of Humanists UK speak on the wireless last Sunday, I realise that they would really prefer to have no 'Religion' section on the census at all because they believe that religion should play no part in public life and that it is an irrational trope from past generations that ought to be encouraged to die out as quickly as possible. I believe that faith and religion are much more fundamental to human life and to human flourishing than that and, in any case, in multi-cultural, multi-faith Britain, it is essential to know what the needs of the population are if the state or local government are going to have any chance of meeting them in those areas of life with which government is involved.

Today's reading in John's Gospel prefigures the crucifixion, but does so not by detailing the events that are to come, that appears later in the Gospel, but by giving warning of the overwhelming significance of those events. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself", says Jesus, and that is my belief, that Jesus drew all people to himself by dying on the cross on the first Good Friday, and our faith in that fact is revitalised when we think on these things each subsequent Good Friday.

Clive Lemmon