



**THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY
TRINITY 2
21 JUNE 2020**

Jeremiah 20:7-13, Romans 6:1b-11, Matthew 10:24-39

Gareth and I have been much diverted over the past months by the birds in our garden, especially the regulars. There are two cock blackbirds, we have named Bill and Ben, who seem inseparable, and hop around together all the time. There is another cock blackbird (we have named Fred), who is tamer than the others. We think he may be the same bird Gareth rescued from a squirrel trap a year or two ago. He waits around in a magnolia bush at the time he thinks food should be provided, and looks pointedly in at the kitchen window. There are also two hen blackbirds, which the cocks ignore most of the time, except to chase them off if there is food in the offing. We have rather taken to shooing the cocks off to give the hens a chance.

Best of all, however, the past couple of weeks has been an adolescent robin, who was first attracted by Gareth's work taking apart the compost heap and so revealing all sorts of potential robin food. It has been virtually impossible to drive a spade into the ground without the robin being in the way, perched on the spade, or on the exact spot where the spade is about to be driven in. Having twigged that human activity promises food, the robin has taken to following me around the garden to see what I am doing. The bird seems to know no fear, and he/she is captivating.

Why all these anthropomorphised ornithological observations? Because, of course, my eye was immediately drawn to the Gospel reference to the two sparrows sold for a penny. Birds are so regularly present in our garden that it is easy to take them for granted, but these that I have mentioned, that we can identify separately, have taken on for us an individuality of their own. We know them better than some of our human neighbours. If one of them were 'to fall to the ground' we would notice, and mourn their absence, so it becomes possible to have some germ of a sense of what the Father's care might be for his creation.

Now this is a good thing to bear in mind when considering the rest of the Gospel reading, which is pretty uncompromising as Our Lord explains to the twelve disciples he is sending out the hostility they are likely to encounter, and how the seemingly laudable relationship of a child to its parents seems to be set at nothing in comparison with the relationship Jesus is demanding that his disciples have with him.

This is the same sort of message that Jeremiah (always a barrel of laughs), in today's Old Testament, brings us. Jeremiah feels himself compelled by the Lord to speak out God's message, although it brings nothing but criticism, condemnation and worse from his erstwhile friends.

We don't find that much relief in the Epistle reading, either, with its talk of dying with Christ.

The concern the Father has for the two sparrows is the key to understanding these readings. If God's love for creatures of such little value as two sparrows is so constant and overwhelming, how much more is it for a human being worth more than many sparrows? Overwhelming squared? Incalculable? Use what word you will, the point is that it is vast. Set alongside this, affectionate human relationships pale into insignificance. This takes me back to what I was trying to say on Mothering Sunday, about human and divine love. If we can grasp this we can face the worst that life, and death, throws at us, if not with equanimity, at least with a sure-footed confidence that all will be well. It is this sense that gave Jeremiah the power to speak, that gave Paul the resolution to pursue his life's work, through many vicissitudes, that gave eleven of the twelve the courage to proclaim the gospel, even if it led to martyrdom. What might it do for you and me today?

Clive Lemmon