

I don't like golf; I love it. Especially the spectacle of the Augusta Masters each sunny April. I love watching golf in the spring. Even more so, I love visiting churches. But I don't like seeing golf in churches. In fact, I can't bear to think about what happened recently in Rochester Cathedral in Kent. In August 2019, Rochester Cathedral cleared all the pews out, and replaced them with astroturf putting greens so that 9 holes of adventure golf could be played. Thankfully the golf was paused during services and putters *putterway*. Those in charge of the cathedral thought golf could bring people closer to God. Maybe they were desperate for worshippers, and a good player might score a holy-in-one if lucky. The whole business of golf in church, actually, is more bogey than birdie, because every church is already a powerful statement of the closeness of the Holy of Holies to all of us. A church building is a proclamation of His glory. Golf is for another time and place.

Also down in Kent, last month, in Canterbury Cathedral, a 'rave in the nave' was held. In England's oldest cathedral – a building founded by those our own St Gregory the Great sent to England – a 1990s silent disco was held. Visitors danced to the likes of the Spice Girls, Vengaboys and Eminem, in an event that officials hoped would attract a new generation of worshippers to the building's hallowed cloisters. They thought the disco could honour God without any mention of Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. That day, a potential Oasis of prayer was turned into a 1990s Blur.

And almost two years ago, even the grounds of the Abbey here hosted a classic car convention, on a Sunday as it happened. That morning during Mass we heard antique engines growling along the North side of the Church. A red open-topped beer bus parked itself in front of the monastery. At least, neither the cars – nor the beer – came into the building – or else we might have had to do as the Lord did and make a whip out of cord, shouting: *Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market*. Jesus goes into the Temple in our gospel and it is not being used for its purpose; the Temple is supposed to be a place of encounter with God and a place of sacrifice and reconciliation with God, and it has been turned into something else; a market square, and Jesus is furious.

Some might say, *it's only a building* – but Jesus says otherwise, calling it his Father's house. Sometimes we might say; *I'm only human* but that too underestimates our lofty vocation to be temples; temples of the holy spirit. And Jesus reveals that soon he will be the new temple of the Lord, sacrificed on the cross for our sake. He will become the holiest sanctuary of them all.

When Christ cleanses the Temple in today's gospel he is not merely clearing out the corruption. He is actually doing something much more fundamental. He is announcing himself as the new Temple, he is inaugurating something new, something more than stone and mortar, a temple of flesh and body, soul and divinity. And then with his whole life He shows us what life as the Temple, life in the presence of God, life in union with God looks like. He shows us what it looks like to be a member of the new Temple, His Body, the Church, which shall not pass away.

Some people say that their body is a temple, that's why they work out and watch what they eat. The temple that is your body is important because of what it contains; namely, your soul. The idea, for each of us, that our Body is a Temple, is something to remember often. By baptism you became a Temple, you became the dwelling place of God. The same purging that Jesus began in the Jerusalem Temple to throw out all that is corrosive, all that is an obstacle to the worship of God and to the love of our neighbour: that is the purpose of Lent.

A place of worship such as this has a clear purpose, and so did the temple in Jerusalem. Golf and disco dancing and car shows are good things but belie the purpose of a Church or Cathedral. Jesus Christ and the Commandments show us what the human person is for. You have a purpose, as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Our purpose is to make to know and love God and to know and love our neighbour, and the only way that this can be truly done is the offer of ourselves, body and soul, an offering in imitation of that of Jesus, who at each Mass, offers us His very self: body, blood, soul, and divinity, so that we might have the strength and courage to live out the extraordinary purpose He has given us. We realise that purpose every time we gather as temples within the temple, establishing the temple of Christ Jesus with souls, hearts and minds made right with God.

A verse from our first hymn:

*To this temple, where we call thee,  
come, O Lord of Hosts, today;  
With thy wonted loving-kindness  
Hear thy servants when they pray;  
and thy fullest benediction  
shed within its walls alway.*