

Time to Remember...

Like anyone else, I can get nostalgic. I can find myself thinking back to the glory days of my youth, especially that time when the world was my oyster - that youthful time before responsibilities began to arrive. There were golden scenarios around, as I began a career in the oil-exploration game in the middle of a booming oil rush in Western Canada. Soon there would be a cottage on a lake for the summer breaks, and a four-wheel drive to go ice-fishing with in winter.

Then God came calling, and everything changed. The life-savings went towards my theological education, and after three years I arrived in 1979 as junior curate of Walton in Liverpool with several boxes of books, and a suitcase of clothes, and £40 left in the bank, on a stipend of £200 per month. The second day I was there, the Rector explained that all four of us who shared Walton Rectory had to 'divvy up' room-and-board each month, so could he please have £70, money which I wouldn't have until the end of the month! So I went to Barclays down the road and asked for a £200 loan to be repayable on demand. Could I give a credit reference, asked the manager. I said I was new to the country and had no established credit rating, but would Almighty God do for a reference? He looked a bit startled, but then laughed, and loaned me the £200.

Broke I may have been, but also incredibly rich. Depleted in pocket, but rich in the things of God, in the life of the Spirit. It was a good experience which made me realise that in my former life in the oil business I had been in the process of being seduced by materialism, the love of money and the plastic dreams of wealth and possessions – which, let's be honest, are never as fulfilling as we think they are going to be. My experience taught me true riches are in God, not in the bank.

As I write, the financial crisis deepens, and many people are very anxious about mortgages, life savings, and all the rest. Various bail-outs are going on to try and mitigate the effects of the greed and fraud and love of money that created the problem over the last couple of decades. It will be a very sobering experience for many, and I pray for those whose jobs and homes are at risk.

Money needs to come back into the right perspective. The love of money, says Holy Scripture, is the root of all evil. It is not saying that money itself is evil – it's when it obsesses us and possesses us that we are in spiritual danger; when money and the whole materialistic culture has become an idol, enthroned on our hearts in the place that belongs to God.

If there is to be a silver lining to the financial storms of the present, and the distressing consequences for many people, could it be that we come to know again that it is the eternal riches that God offers us in Christ through his Church that really matter? I would be glad to talk with anyone about that!

Love and prayers.

Stephen