

**Murmurings or Music?**  
**Choral Evening Prayer, Wakefield Cathedral**  
**Installation of Precentor and Lay Canons**  
**Sunday 3 May 2009**

‘Your murmurings are not against us but against the Lord.’ Exodus. 16.8.

One of the great recent heroes of these parts is undoubtedly Bishop Trevor Huddleston. A Mirfield father, Huddleston was a turbulent priest and not always an easy colleague. But Trevor was clearly a prophet. His book *Naught for Your Comfort* was one of those things that helped convict me that I might have a priestly vocation. During his years in South Africa, one of the most moving stories was that of Hugh Masekela’s trumpet. Visiting the home of a poor black family in Johannesburg’s Sophiatown, Trevor stumbled on the young lad Hugh. Hugh told Trevor how he wanted to learn to play the trumpet but his father would not buy him one. Truth was that they could not afford it. Just a few weeks on and Hugh had his first trumpet and Trevor had bought it. Nine years ago now, at Trevor’s Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey it was Hugh who played a fanfare and air for Trevor. He had become one of the leading trumpet virtuosi in the world.

The power of music to touch the heart is unparalleled and inexplicable. Music can move us in ways that words and even actions can rarely do. That is one of the main reasons we are here this afternoon. Andi has come to help inspire, innovate and consolidate the stunning music for which this cathedral has become famed. It is a fantastic and exciting task to embrace, but it is daunting too. It is daunting perhaps most of all since no one can do it alone.

Two weeks ago, my wife and I went to an orchestral concert at Huddersfield Town Hall. Any event there is dramatic. It is a wonderful auditorium. West Yorkshire sure knew how to build town halls! But this particular evening was special. All the music was accessible, but the last item was amazing. It was that set of movements, written by Mussorgsky and orchestrated by Ravel called *Pictures at An Exhibition*. The final movement, *The Great Gate of Kiev* was unforgettable. As near as makes no odds, one hundred players joined forces, their instruments culminating in one great paean of joy and excitement.

None of this could have happened, of course, with just an assorted set of individuals. Everyone mattered – trombones, bassoon, harp, timpani – even a great bell – and, of course, the conductor. But that sense of music being one enormous tapestry, of symphony goes deeper still. Symphony means, of course, voices together, voices in concert. Only a moment’s reflection points to the subtlety, the complexity, the extraordinary coming together of different elements that give music the power to touch our souls. Three strands are perhaps essential. We might call them *form*, *creativity* and *performance*.

What made the *Pictures at An Exhibition* such an amazing experience? Perhaps the starting point is *form*, or if you like pattern or order. Music is shaped. There are movements. Even within these movements there is form. But before that even, there are the crotchets and quavers, the clefs and the bar lines that give music its shape. Then, secondly, there is the *creative impulse*, the melodies, the folk tunes that often stand behind a symphony, a sonata or a song. Mussorgsky’s music that evening was soaked in Russian or Ukrainian traditional melodies. And then finally, of course, there is the performance. Now all of that which we are living and experiencing this afternoon in the music we’re hearing is also something in which we are taking part ourselves. We are part of the performance.

But these patterns go deeper still. It may not just be confined to music. For is there not something here about the Church and about our faith? This afternoon we have installed two lay canons and a precentor. Let us think on just that. John Bullimore brings with him a lifetime as a lawyer – both as a

barrister and a judge but also as a diocesan chancellor and chair of tribunals. John's expertise reminds us of the *bar lines* and *clefs*, the *musical form almost* which disciplines and shapes the life of our Church and the form of our faith. Yaqub brings to us the unique cultural contribution of Asian Christians. That tradition, alongside so many others brings its own *folk melodies*, if you like, its distinctive patterning of our faith *its creativity*. Our faith is enriched by so many different cultures. Then finally, Andi brings to us the vibrancy and excitement of *performance*. Like great music, faith is as nothing if it is not lived, indeed celebrated. So the imagery of the symphony – or even the oratorio or cantata is richly descriptive of the Christian life and of the orchestra of which we are all a part.

Right at the start of these words, I announced (fairly unusually for me) a text. From our first reading, it ran: 'Your murmurings are not against *us* but *against the Lord*.' That first reading about the manna is peppered with references to *murmuring*. Not only that, but if we'd had but one more verse from John in our second lesson, we'd have been back to *murmuring*. Both readings point to the great feast to which God invites us all. But both readings also show how murmuring, whinging, moaning and complaining eat into and undermine true faith. We are not immune to that ourselves and it is corrosive of community and faith.

This afternoon is utterly dissociated from murmuring and moans. It is the antithesis to complaint and whinging. It is instead a celebration of that *symphony of faith* to which we are all called to take a part. Nowhere is that symphony or that great feast better described than by John Donne in his great sermon which celebrates the life of faith in places like this cathedral. Let me remind you:

'They shall awake as Jacob did', Donne wrote, 'and say as Jacob said. *Surely the Lord is in this place, and This is none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven, And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where there shall be no Cloud nor Sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity.*'

In this great celebration, through our three new canons, that is what we live today – one equal light, communion and eternity – *one equal music*.

Amen.

Readings:

Exodus. 16. 4-15

John. 6. 30-40