

**Wednesday 3 June 2020**

**Homily by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship**

Loving Father, may all that I think and the words that I say be inspired by your love. Amen.

So we're in the season of Pentecost. I love Pentecost, particularly this year. It seems very relevant. Here you have a bunch of Apostles in lockdown in a room in Jerusalem. They get filled with the Holy Spirit and break out. That's great. I'm looking forward to doing that myself. Love it!

They start speaking in tongues and the crowd outside think they're drunk. Now this got me thinking - the crowd judged the Disciples; they made assumptions about them and they got it wrong.

How many times in our lives have we made the same mistake?

Some years ago, I was driving down the M1. It was a warm Sunday evening. The traffic was heavy but not congested; it was moving but everyone's speed was being kept to about 60mph.

Now, I'm not sure how many of you have had experience of driving on the motorway. Not everyone has. But, if you have, you'll understand that, in those kind of traffic conditions, you tend to find yourself bunching up in loose groups of the same cars. You find yourself passing the

same cars and then, in turn, being passed yourself by those cars. It's a sort of to-and-fro line dancing of vehicles.

As you pass the cars and they pass you, you start to study the drivers and passengers and make snap judgements about them, based purely on appearance. There's the soft-top white Peugeot with two young girls - bet they've been away for a wild weekend; here's a family saloon with mum and dad in the front looking grumpy because their three kids in the back are bickering with each other. And here's the Land Rover with a middle-aged trendy artist, looking like a hippy on his way back from a surfing holiday.

You start making up stories about them without knowing any of the facts; you think you know what they're like. But it's all fiction, really.

And then, in your rear-view mirror you see it: a set of bright headlights, coming fast down the outside lane. Is it a police car? Doesn't matter, I'm not breaking the speed limit, but I am in the fast lane and I should probably get out of the way.

One by one, this car is coming up close behind the car in front and flashing its headlights and the car in front eases out of the way, and the fast car moves on and does the same to the next vehicle. We've all seen it happen.

Eventually, it's my turn. Here he comes, right on my bumper. Flashes his headlights. I look in the mirror and realise that it's not a police car but an ordinary black

Mercedes with a single driver. I look again.

He's a man in his 50s, dark hair swept back, black moustache. Dark glasses (sorry, shades). Suave. Bit of a lad by the look of him. Confident. Probably a sales manager. No offence to professional salesmen, but you know the type, don't you? Pushy, self-confident. You can almost hear him thinking: *Get out of my way*. And I start to play my game with him. I decide that he's either an arms dealer or a character from the film *Men in Black*. Let's just call him Man in Shades.

I am just about to move over when, suddenly, and I wasn't expecting this, the car in front slows down. In fact, all the cars around me slow down. And stop. They came to a complete standstill.

I sit there, wondering what's going on. Then I realise that, just a few yards up the motorway there is a line of police cars, blue lights flashing. The police have closed the road because of an accident. No-one is going anywhere fast. An ambulance passes us on the hard shoulder. The Man in Shades is making a phone call on his mobile, as you'd expect him to do.

After about five minutes, it's clear that we aren't going to move and drivers start getting out of their cars. I do. Now, that's a strange experience, to be standing in the fast lane of the M1 on a Sunday evening in summer, but that's another story.

I walk up to the police barrier to find out what's happening. The Man in Shades does the same. *Oh, here we go, I think, he's going to give the police a hard time; say how important he is, how he's got to get to London by 8.00 o'clock for dinner, something like that.*

A policeman comes over. He isn't very pleased that we'd got out of our cars. The Man in Shades leans forward and says to the policeman in what is a very gentle voice: *I'm terribly sorry, I don't want to make a fuss and I realise that you're dealing with a serious incident here, but I'm a surgeon at Great Ormond Street Hospital. An eight-year-old girl has just gone into theatre for an operation on a brain tumour and I'm the only doctor with the experience to oversee the operation that will save her life.*

*Oh, I think, I got him completely wrong.* I creep back to my car, ashamed. It's a true story.

The police guided him through the traffic and he shot off down the motorway, past the accident, in the fast lane, headlights on. But this time he had a police escort, because he really is important.

I'd like to think that it was a life changing moment. I learnt - as we all have to - that you can't judge anyone just by their appearance. But do I still do it? Of course I do. We all do it.

God doesn't.

And I hope the little girl in the operating theatre at Great Ormond Street survived and is leading a happy life.

