

A scholar's wisdom comes of ample leisure; to be wise he must be relieved of other tasks.
How can one become wise who follows the plough.... and whose talk is all about cattle?

Ecclus. 38: 24/5. REB.

My friends, not many of you should become teachers.

St James 3:1

I will go unto the altar of God. *Psalm 43: 4*

When I had the privilege of preaching at Allan Jenkins' Ruby Anniversary of priesthood only a few short years ago, I chose *three* texts instead of the usual *one*, and somehow it just seems right to do the same thing again today. But they are different texts now, and at first sight they seem to have nothing in common, but they unite beautifully in the person of the priest, teacher and scholar, who has drawn us here today by reason of his death. Fr Mark Preece has set the scene movingly in his tribute at the beginning of the service-paper, and drawn attention to the unexpected brevity of Allan's retirement, which we all lament. It says something about character of the man who has drawn us all here today that he approached his final call with quiet acceptance and dignity.

A funeral of a priest is often something of a surprise to those who are unfamiliar with the Church's ways. It often seems that the rites of the Church take over in a way that is just not usual at the funeral of someone who is not in Holy Orders. There is obviously the presence of a large number of robed priests for a start. The service seems to assume that everyone is on the same wave-length, even though this really cannot be taken for granted. However, at today's Requiem Eucharist, we can all rest in the sure knowledge that it has all been very carefully thought through, for Father Allan had made his wishes clearly known, when he knew that he had not all that long to live.

On behalf of the rest of us here, I extend our Christian sympathy and therefore our supportive love to Allan's brother, Colin, and to the other members of the family, who have all cared for Allan with such love and devotion, and watched with him and over him during these last difficult weeks and months. Father Allan was a bachelor, and often at the funeral of a bachelor there is a sense that all is now over; and it can seem a very real and final full stop. Perhaps in some cases it is just that; but most certainly not in this particular case. No, the life and influence of the bachelor Allan Kenneth Jenkins will live on in the lives of all those to whom he ministered, in the lives of all those he taught, and also in that specialised common pool of knowledge we know as Old Testament study, in which Doctor Allan Jenkins was a distinguished figure, and a Hebraist of distinction. His book, 'Biblical Scholarship and the Church: a sixteenth century crisis of authority' which came out in 2007 (in collaboration with another scholar Patrick Preston) shows Allan as having a scholarly vision which took his speciality to an area well outside the normal range of classical Old Testament scholarship.

Allan and I go back to single figures. As children we lived across the road from each other at the Margam end of Port Talbot. We both fell under the influence of a remarkable young and vigorous curate at St Theodore's Port Talbot, Father Glyn Bowen, and so did many others; and although we went to different grammar schools in the town, we had, together with some other young lads, some good 'quality time' together (as the saying goes), as we went to the beach, or went for long walks or bicycle rides, played canasta, samba and monopoly, and in our early teens spent an excessive amount of time in that well-known form of idle vagabondage known as train-spotting. I am fairly sure that this is the only time I have ever actually occupied the pulpit for the funeral of a boyhood friend.

Well, all good teenage things came to an end, and we went our separate ways to university. Allan went on to King's College London (armed with a State Scholarship) to read Physics. He had always been a scientist and mathematician, whilst most of the rest of the gang had opted for arts subjects. Indeed, while the rest of us would have said,

‘How many times have I told you (something or other)?’ Allan the mathematician would unfailingly declare: ‘I have told you n times.’ Church-wise, Allan had indeed been a good young churchman, and was an altar server, yet we were all totally taken by surprise when, towards the end of his first year at the university, it became clear to him that a scientific career was not going to be his destiny, and that he would be seeking ordination. The seeds planted by the life and example of that great and good priest Glyn Bowen had been vigorously watered (so I gather) in the London University Chaplaincy by a brilliant, albeit maverick and I can say most exasperating, Welsh priest, who was the senior chaplain there. That was Father Gordon Phillips, who some years later became for a short period the Dean of Llandaff. (I worked with him there during that time.) He it was who also convinced Allan that he should change his academic course at once, on the grounds that science was changing so fast that it would be no use to him at all, and the sooner he changed the better. Not everyone agreed with this, but time was to show that Father Phillips was right, for once Allan had made the change he revealed an almost instant flair for Oriental Languages, and indeed over the years he evolved into a Hebraist of distinction. Bishop Glyn Simon recognised this, and made sure that he was initially sent to a comparatively light parochial post at Cowbridge. He was made deacon on St James’s Day in 1964; that is why today’s Gospel reading was chosen. It was a remarkable occasion, because at what was a normal General Ordination four of those being ordained all came from St Theodore’s Port Talbot (one priest – me – and three deacons of who Allan was one; the other two were Brian Lucas, who unfortunately cannot be here today, and the late Robert Britton), and the ordaining bishop was Bishop T M Hughes, who had himself been a curate at St Theodore’s. For part of his early time at Cowbridge Allan was in fact non-resident, for he was studying at the *École Biblique* in Jerusalem under the great Old Testament scholar, Père Roland de Vaux. Then after Cowbridge there came a great change, when he went out to India for about six years or so, teaching Biblical Studies at the University of Serampore, and being Warden of the students’ hostel.

And here at last my texts come in. When St James wrote ‘*My friends, not many of you should become teachers*’, he probably did not expect that when those words of his would be read aloud 2000 years later there would usually be some gentle chuckling. His point, though, was a real one. We shall, he said, have to answer for what we teach. In other words, teaching is a serious business, carrying the great responsibility of influencing for good or for ill those who listen to what we have to impart. Allan’s life is a classic example of one who combined in his person an almost ideal balance of the preacher and the teacher. The early Church distinguished carefully between these roles, but saw both as essential in the building up of the Christian community. Allan’s ministry in the Church of God was one of priestly ministry being exercised in both pastoral and academic spheres. In his case he could move from the one to the other with comparative ease. Not everyone can: there are pastors who preach, but find the preaching hard; and there are preachers who pastor, but perhaps find their preaching gifts easier to exercise than some of the aspects of pastoral ministry. Allan *could* do this, and the record of his service bears this out.

Ben Sirach in the book Ecclesiasticus generalised a bit too readily, when he wrote *A scholar's wisdom comes of ample leisure; to be wise he must be relieved of other tasks. How can one become wise who follows the plough.... and whose talk is all about cattle?* He had not met Allan Jenkins. Whilst Allan did not literally follow the plough and just talk about cattle, he was certainly very much at home in rural ministry, even though he himself was a townie, but he was quite able to combine this with the work of theological teaching. On his return from India this was possible first of all at Llanarth, and again later on in East Anglia, where he was Senior Tutor of the local Ministerial training course, and a part-time lecturer at Westcott House in Cambridge. In between those two posts he was Director of Studies at Chichester Theological College, the oldest theological college in the Church of England, and now, alas, closed. After several years of keeping in touch by little more than the Christmas mailing (for he was in India and I was in the Royal Navy), his stay at Chichester meant that he and I were able to be in regular contact once more, since I by then was only an hour or so away working as a Canon-Residentiary at Guildford Cathedral. It turned out that during this period we were able to see rather

more of each other, because he invited me to do some lecturing and tutorial work at the college for several years on early liturgical texts. After Chichester, the Church in Wales reclaimed him, and he spent eight years or so as Senior Chaplain to the University and colleges here in Cardiff. It was a major job, with many ancillary tasks: he was also in charge of the parish of St Andrew and St Teilo, the church in Cathays where so many of university students lived; the diocese used him on a variety of education and theological committees; and he was much involved with the work of the South Glamorgan Health Authority particularly in connexion with the HIV/AIDS care co-ordinating team. Yet in some way, even though this was undoubtedly an important post, it turned out to be the one job in which he did not really have a serious academic teaching role. Whilst he must surely have done an inordinate amount of catechizing as a University Chaplain, in the end he felt the call to return to more specifically academic work, and so the Church in Wales lost him once more. He returned to Sussex, this time to Sidlesham, looking after this semi-rural parish on the edge of Chichester, but primarily being a tutor at the University of Chichester, and where he eventually became a Senior Lecturer. He served in the Diocese of Chichester in all for over twenty years, almost half his ministry.

But, says the psalmist (and here is the third text), *I will go unto the altar of God*; and that is the place where the undergirding of all this ministry was to be found. It is worth remembering that Allan's total change of direction was not from science to semitic languages; it was from being a scientist to being a priest. His other academic abilities had yet to be discovered. While the rest of all thought that Allan Jenkins would be a scientist, God knew better, and caught him before he went too far down that road. The call of God, or, perhaps better the Invitation of God (for he does not despise his own gift to us of free will), comes with an R.S.V.P. attached. It may take a long time to make the reply, but sooner or later it has to be done, and in Allan's case such a change of course could not have been easy. Something similar no doubt must have occupied his mind as he contemplated going overseas. [I remember a missionary bishop saying many years ago that he had spent two miserable years in his first curacy, wondering whether or not he should go out to the UMCA in Central Africa; the call was not welcome but it was insistent, and for those two years his very un-Isaianic reply was 'Here am I, send *him*.' (But eventually he went.)] Constantly in life we are all in receipt of a daily invitation from God to live a full and fulfilled Christian life; but from time to time that Invitation seems to come by Special Delivery, and we are aware that a very special call has come, and we instinctively know what our response must be.

At Allan's 40th anniversary of priesthood I quoted from George Herbert's strange little poem 'Aaron.' I am going to do so again, but this time a different verse:

Christ is my only head,
My alone-only heart and breast,
My only music, striking me even dead,
That to the old man I may rest
And be in Him new drest.

Those words curiously relate to the call of God, both to the priesthood, and now on the occasion of Allan's last call in this life. In Herbert's poem we see a picture of consecration, a true offering of life, and it is that sort of thing that we are doing at Allan's Requiem. There is a beauty of priestly ministry, which is sometimes transparently obvious in the lives and ministries of some who *have* responded to the call of God to serve him in this way. It is Candlemas Day today: the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, with Our Lady and St Joseph also making the offerings required by the Jewish Law. This is Allan's time of Presentation in the place where there is no Temple made with hands. What does Allan now bring to the glorified Christ, not trusting in his own righteousness, but only in God's manifold and great mercy? Perhaps the Epiphany hymn is a help here:

'Truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness:
These are the offerings to lay at his shrine'

– in this case that means a lifetime of priestly servant-ministry.

God wanted Allan to be a priest; and Allan eventually replied, if not exactly in these words, ‘Behold, the servant of the Lord; be it unto me, according to thy word.’

‘Truth in its beauty’: the work of a scholar and teacher.

‘Love in its tenderness’: the work of the pastor and priest.

To change poets for a moment. Those of you who know Gerard Manley Hopkins’ lovely sonnet ‘As kingfishers catch fire’ may remember how in it all our nature and all our attributes speak, and they all spell out this: ‘**What I do is me: for that I came.**’ But then come the strange and wonderful lines – the first two perhaps not all that easy to follow, but the next line is electrifyingly clear:

**‘I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is – Christ.’**

By ‘the just man’ Hopkins means ‘the Christian’, who radiates out in the eyes of God *not* just his own inborn unique character (which the first part of the sonnet actually stresses) but the true reality of Christ, since the grace of God in Jesus Christ is active in him. What Hopkins is telling us is that it is the task of the Christian, it is the task of the whole Church, and very specifically it is the task of the priest, **to be Jesus, to make him present**, and to make him known and loved in the world. And it is within that context that Allan was called to be servant, pastor, scholar, teacher, guide, and (as all priests know) to a peculiar pastoral and eucharistic intimacy with Jesus in his Passion, to enter His heart, to live within His consecration and His self-offering. It was the feast of St John Bosco two days ago; on the eve of his ordination his mother said to him ‘To say Mass is to begin to suffer.’ That is where the crunch comes; such a call is absolute and knows no half-measures: For in one’s priesthood one is either crucified with Christ, or sadly one gives up the struggle.

‘I will go unto the altar of God.’ Those words from Psalm 43, were, until quite modern times, said in the rite of Preparation at the foot of the altar steps at every Eucharist in the western tradition. And they were said three times; it is not fanciful to think that the three times point to three aspects of that intention: ‘I will go unto the altar of God’ to plead in Christ the merits of his one perfect sacrifice; ‘I will go unto the altar of God’ that I may be a holy and living sacrifice to God in this life; and (says the priest) ‘I will go unto the altar of God’ because you have called me to do so.’ The former Archbishop of Wales, Dr John Morgan, once told an altar server of his in Brecon who was contemplating ordination, ‘Never forget that the only real reason for becoming a priest is that you feel called to offer the holy sacrifice at the altar.’ (Almost everything else can be done by someone else.) The joys and sorrows of the life of a priest all meet there.

Here at the altar we thank God upon every remembrance of Allan, and pray now that he may rest in the peace of the Lord he loved and served so well. Allan now returns in his priesthood for it to be absorbed for ever into the eternal priesthood of Christ. In the providence of God, it is for this very reason that he has come, in Christ, and in his priesthood, to the hour of his death. And now, with Christ, and in Christ, he can truly say, ‘Father, glorify thy name.’

So let us go back to George Herbert, and give him the last word. Perhaps he will forgive us, if we change the last-but-one word, and instead of ‘Aaron’ read something else, as Allan Kenneth Jenkins, priest, ‘enters into his rest.’ So;

Holy in my head,
Perfect and light in my dear breast;
My doctrine tuned by Christ who is not dead,

But lives in me while I do rest.
Come, people, Allan's drest.

We shall all miss this quiet, scholarly and lovely priest. May he rest in peace, and rise in glory.

Canon Richard Hanford