

## Riots in August

14 8 11

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,  
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern  
both our hearts and bodies  
in the ways of your laws  
and the works of your commandments;  
that through your most mighty protection both here and ever,  
we may be preserved in body and soul

I didn't preach today: the Revd John Gay was our visiting preacher but had I done so my first intention would have been to have preached on the Blessed Virgin Mary since tomorrow, 15<sup>th</sup> August, is the Feast of the Assumption. But given the disturbing events that occurred in England after the initially peaceful demonstrations on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August in Tottenham following the shooting dead of a young black man, I feel I must write if not preach a sermon on the resulting troubles.

Riots; disturbances; troubles: all three words are profoundly unsettling to us as Christians because it tells us clearly that all is not well in our world. There may be and have been demonstrations across the Arab world: Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya Dubai and Syria but in England? Of course, there were the riots in Brixton and Toxteth in the early 80s whose cause were rooted in racism and alienation but what we were seeing seemed generational rather than racial disaffection.

It seems as if our society is failing to cohere. There is a sense of them and us. It now seems okay for some (at least to them at the time) to burn, loot and steal, to commit acts violence against the police and property and to take part in widespread, public disorder. There is a desire to have something for nothing; to take without paying; to get without earning. There is no doubt there is a real buzz and sense of excitement and belonging by being an anonymous part of a crowd, a hooded, masked member of a mob. And the internet age of mobile phones, of Blackberries and I Pads, of Tweets and Twitter facilitates and perhaps drives the unrest.

But why ? As a priest, as a Christian, I am bound to say that there is a fundamental lack of respect – respect for God; respect for Man; respect for self. Of course, you can be moral without being religious and you can be religious without being moral but the fact is that faith in God carries with it a code of ethics, a sense of right and wrong. And if folk took seriously the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> commandments to honour parents and not to steal, how could the disorder have occurred ? If the envy warned against in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment was not regularly fuelled by manic consumerism and advertising, inappropriate dreams would not become our waking nightmare.

Okay, I do accept the reasons that caused what we saw and heard are complex but I do know with a due sense of love of God and love of neighbour, we would not approach unease and unrest in so destructive way which ultimately is in no one's interests.

But let me just say that it is neither healthy nor helpful to be looking for scapegoats and deriving schadenfreude from the punishment of the perpetrators. As Christians, we should always be mindful of repentance and forgiveness and that through the grace of God, no one is beyond the pale. Of course, bad things have been done by bad people and many have suffered as a consequence. But in the sight of God, as St Paul tells us, we are all wrong-doers and have fallen short of the standards God wants us to follow. Clearly, then, we are all sinful but as Christians, we should want to help where we can and to be ready to rebuild what is broken.

I have written in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*14<sup>th</sup> August, 2011*

H: Sermon 24: Riots in August

