

It is, perhaps, a bit of a tired – and even tiresome – truism to say that we find ourselves in a time of crisis. Every generation thinks of itself as something special, and our own – this world of 2025 – is no exception. As war continues to rage on the edges of Europe, as political choices seem to offer less and less when more is needed, as our natural environment once again takes a back seat to financial concerns, as faith in our leaders, in wider society and even within the church, is waning fast, and where the precariousness of our daily lives seems just a little more raw, a little more present, it is hard not to feel that we are in trouble like never before.

Yet whilst it may feel like that, it is possibly more accurate to say that we seem to be approaching another peak – a peak in the history of humanity’s endless self-destructive calamity – yet a peak amongst many. So much of what we see in the confusing, bewildering landscape of our world is not new – indeed, looking beyond some of the peripherals, and some of the expressions particular to our time – looking beyond the Putins and the Trumps, indeed looking behind

the devastation in Ukraine, Israel, and Gaza – we see the same social, or perhaps dissocial, dynamics playing out, the same disordered will and fetid imagination, the same self-centredness, pride, greed, rage, lies, envy, idolatry – the same things that St Paul, drawing on the wisdom of the prophets, diagnosed as both cause and symptoms of the ills of society. In each generation they might manifest differently, yet in each generation we can see them if we look carefully enough. In every crisis we find them writ large, and our own is no exception.

For whilst it may indeed be a little trite to talk of crisis, that does not make it any less true. And whilst, looking around, it is easy to become so absorbed in the messiness and even despair of human wickedness, nonetheless this crisis we find ourselves in – this crisis that has smouldered and burst into so many parts of our lives – this crisis may yet have within it the possibility of renewal, of new things, of grace. This crisis may hold within the cacophony of rage a still small voice of calm reminding us that this will not stand.

This crisis may yet deliver something of a transfiguration in our world and in our lives.

For crisis is surely a time when we decide who and what we trust – indeed, when we discern in whom we do, and can, place our trust. Crisis is a time when in its critical instability, our human nature can yield up a moment of change, a determination to not only look but to act differently. Crisis is a time where difficult, important decisions are forced into our hands, a moment of societal apoplexy when we can no longer spend our time grasping for the simplistic but are instead faced with the complexity of life in all its fulness.

Yet we must surely ask, can, and does, the church have anything to say into this? In a world where secularism is at least presumed, if not always present, and in a society where utility and reductionism seem to have triumphed, what, then, of an institution that springs from something we claim to be truth in a world that denies its possibility? Does a church whose credibility has been shot through so often by its own unforced errors have anything to speak into a

world which is groaning, close and closer to the precipice of crisis, yet so often without direction?

It will not surprise you to know that I think that the church does indeed have something to say – yet it is only by humbling itself, by reorienting itself to its rightful place as a servant of truth and not its master, it is only through a process of discernment and prayer, a commitment to serving the crucified Christ, that we can hope to speak into a world which needs not us, not you and me, but the grace and goodness of the God who loved us into being.

For into this crisis, we do not need to speak mere niceties, nor platitudes, nor simplistic creeds which stem the bleeding but lose the limb. Into this crisis, we need not only words, but belief in and willingness to collaborate with a God whose transformation of the world is not mere optimism but instead is lived hope, good news not only to those we identify with, or for whom we can most easily empathise, but for the entire created order. Into this crisis, we need to be able to name not only the sin that seeps

through the structures of our societies and that lurks deep in the human heart, but we need to be able to name, too, the new heaven and new earth bursting through into the world of today, the new heaven and new earth that remind us of the giftedness of human life, and the reality of the eternal life into which we are *already* called.

‘While distrustful souls see nothing but darkness falling upon the face of the earth, we prefer to restate our confidence in our Saviour, who has not left the world he redeemed. Indeed, making our own Jesus’ recommendation that we learn to discern “the signs of the times”, it seems to us that we can make out, in the midst of so much darkness, more than a few indications that enable us to have hope for the fate of the Church and of humanity.’

So began *Humanae Salutis*, the Apostolic Constitution of Pope St John XXIII, as he launched the momentous second Vatican Council on Christmas Day 1961. So must, surely, our call to the world today begin, today.

For Christian hope – the hope we profess at the Eucharist, the hope we proclaim in the building up of the Kingdom of Heaven, the hope we find in sacred scripture, in the life and work of the church, the hope we might not dare to name through our doubts and our despair – Christian hope is the thing we must graft ourselves into if we are to discern the signs of the times, and to strive for the Kingdom of God. Christian hope is that which calls out to us – is not life more than this? Are you not of more value than this?

And Christian hope is a hope which holds our feet to the fire, a hope that does not pretend or patronise, that does not ignore the cries of the othered, of the despised, of the marginalised, of the poor, but instead is a hope that demands we pay attention, that we truly repent, turning back to God and in doing so serving and truly listening to those who sit so close to his sacred heart. It is a hope that demands we turn towards the devastating fire of injustice and fight for justice.

For it is in moments of crisis that the question that lies at the core of all our questions of human life is brought into sharp relief – who are we serving? In who do we really put our trust? We know, deep in the very source of our being that we cannot serve two masters, but how tempting it is to try to do so. We know that it is in the conversion of our own hearts that the conversion of society, the impulse for hope at such a time as this, will truly come to birth. And we know not only that it *can* but that it *will* – indeed, that it is *willed* to do so not by our will but by the God whose creative power is endless and whose passionate love for mere mortals like you and me was revealed nailed to a cross, a cross of shame that delivered an abundance of life that continues to burst forth from the empty tomb.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me – I will restore your fortunes and gather you, I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. When the seventy years are over, I will fulfil to you my promise. I know the plans I have

for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

And these plans have already been sown into the very stuff of creation, watered with the lifeblood of the saviour who wills us to trust and to turn again, who calls us through this period of Lent to hope – a hope instilled through faith, and cultivated by love. An active hope, a hope which calls us to action, a hope that can cut through the noise of crisis and which demands we open our own hearts.

And it is a hope which is more real than any attempt by the powers of this world to crush the human soul, for as the former things pass away, there will be God – and there will be the new Jerusalem, and God shall be with them, and be their God.