

30th November 2020

Pride

**“Pride helps us; and pride is not a bad thing
when it only urges us to hide our own hurts, not to hurt others.”**

George Elliot, Middlemarch

According to legend, a Norse army was sneaking up on a Scottish camp when one of the barefooted Norseman stood on a thistle. His cry of pain roused the Scots who succeeded in chasing off the invaders. True or not, the thistle has been the emblem of Scotland since the reign of King Alexander III in the 12th century. “The Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle”, the highest and oldest order of chivalry in Scotland, has a chapel in St Giles’ Kirk in Edinburgh, known as The Thistle Chapel. And the thistle is part of the regimental badge of the Scots Guards, the oldest regiment in the British Army. The Order of the Thistle and the Scots Guards use the motto of the House of Stuart: *Nemo me impune lacessit*, in Scots, often translated as “Wha daur meddle wi’ me?”, or in the vernacular, “Mess with me and you’re in deep trouble”, putting the prickly nature of the thistle and the determination and pride of the Scots closely together.

Now, far be it for me to take issue with the great hymn writer, Isaac Watts, but when he wrote in “When I survey the wondrous Cross”,

*My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

then *I* get kind of prickly! I *think* I know what he means, for when pride becomes arrogance, and arrogance breeds aggression, no-one benefits. Coming to the Cross faces us with the downside of pride.

But I struggle with the word “all” in Watts’ hymn. Surely *all* pride isn’t worthy of contempt? Pride in our heritage; our achievements; our successes; our appearance. And what about our *Gay Pride* marches? These are the up sides to pride, looking for quality and purpose, enhancing community values, striving for betterment.

If the prickliness of the thistle spurs us to pride in such things as these, then I’m proud to have it as my emblem any day.

A prayer for today

Lord, deliver me from pride that does harm; strengthen in me pride that helps. Amen

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