

9th April 2021

Mystery

“Now, my tongue, the mystery telling of the glorious Body sing ...”

St Thomas Aquinas, Pange Lingua Gloriosi

In my first parish, my manse was next to the church, with a garage in between. One morning, there was a barrow beside the garage door. It was a big, builders' barrow, caked in cement and with all the hallmarks of it having been well used on a building site. "Someone working on church repairs?" I mused and went about my business. When I returned, the barrow had gone. The next day, there were two different barrows beside my garage, a garden barrow and a plastic barrow. More musing required, I reckoned. When I got home, both barrows had disappeared. No more mystery ... The following morning, there were three new barrows. The mystery had returned – along with an ever-increasing barrow-count.

So, I made some enquiries. One of my better-informed contacts suggested, "That'll be Billy!" "Who's Billy?" I asked. "Billy-the-Barrow," he replied without a flicker of emotion. My sceptical silence encouraged him to continue. "Billy's into barrows. He nicks them, from anywhere, and stashes them somewhere till he's ready to take them home. He's got dozens. I can show you his garden if you like ..." I declined the invitation.

The mystery of the barrows had now been replaced by the mystery of Billy-the-Barrow, and the "Why?" and "What?" of his barrow fetish. In all the time I was minister in that parish, it was a mystery I never solved.

When St Thomas Aquinas penned his Corpus Christi hymn, *Pange Lingua Gloriosi*, in the 13th century, he used the word "mystery" in his exploration of the meaning of his faith. The Body of Christ was a mystery. The Blood of the Lamb was a mystery. The Kingship of Christ was a mystery. The Virgin Birth was a mystery. God was a mystery. If one mystery was solved, it would be replaced by another. Not everything could be explained. Yet, surrounded by mystery, his faith never wavered.

We're never going to find a solution to everything. The mystery of Billy-the-Barrow taught me that. And not every aspect of the life of faith is open to explanation either. So might we learn to be comfortable living with mystery more than we allow ourselves to be?

Prayer for today

Wrap your mystery round me, Lord, so I might feel safe in my not-knowing. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>