

7th September 2021

Display

“Trust not to outward show.”

Juvenal, Satires (early 2nd century)

Setting up home in the 1950s, my parents furnished their lounge in typical post-War style. There was a “utility” sideboard, a chiming wall-clock, a gate-legged table, a nearly-in-tune piano and a leatherette suite. But pride of place went to my mother’s display cabinet, containing, among other artifacts: two Coronation mugs, a silver-plated teapot, my father’s War-service medals, and a plate, cup and saucer decorated with little roses and with gold-leaf round the edges, part of her “wedding china”. I once asked why it wasn’t used. The rest was in a cupboard somewhere, I was told, and, anyway, “Wedding china is too good for using. It’s only for display.”

On holiday recently in the fishing village of Findochty on the Morayshire coast, we spent a week in a cottage overlooking the harbour. The house had much sailing memorabilia on display: a ship’s bell from an old vessel; photographs of fishing boats from past years; a modern-looking “helm”, or ship’s steering-wheel; and a shiny anchor on a shelf in the lounge. A shiny anchor ... no more than an ornament, a design-feature, lovely of itself, but nothing compared to the anchors I knew back home in Port Seton, the working anchors of the fishing boats. No anchors *there* for display purposes, but anchors designed to do a necessary job.

And what of faith? It, too, can make a home look lovely and be a much-admired design-feature in our lives, like a shiny anchor in a holiday cottage. It may be an attractive representation, but is this the purpose for which it’s designed? Or faith can simply be on display for all to see and marvel at, like wedding china in a display cabinet. But is that what it’s made for? Shouldn’t it be “used for ordinary” and not be only for show?

Our commitment may be decorated with roses and covered in gold leaf. Our beliefs may be shiny ornaments that look good on a shelf. Our faith may be marvelled at when it’s on display. But it’s not Juvenal’s “outward show” that’s to be trusted, when commitment, beliefs and faith were *really* designed to be put to good use.

A prayer for today

Lord, help me not to trust to “outward show”, but to ensure that my service is put to good use to glorify you and benefit your people. Amen