

4th March 2024

Antidote

**“And with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleans the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?”**

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

I stumbled across a presentation on medieval painting on a *Sky Arts* TV programme recently. The Presenter was holding a nondescript little sphere, approximately a centimetre across, about the size of a grape. “This,” he announced triumphantly, “is a *bezoar* [pronounced bee-zor] which was considered to be enormously precious in the Middle Ages.” I gave up on the remainder of the programme and went scurrying off to consult *Google* for an explanation of this new-found treasure.

A “bezoar”, I discovered, is “a small stony concretion which may form in the stomachs of some animals, especially ruminants.” Its “preciousness” is a result of the belief that it could be used as an antidote for various ailments and poisons. In that regard, the ancients considered a bezoar had mystical, somewhat magical, properties. Indeed, *Harry Potter* aficionados out there will confirm that J K Rowling has Severus Snape introduce the students in his “Hogwarts Potions Class” to the bezoar and its wonders.

At the start of Lent, one of the Bible readings recounts Jesus being tempted in the wilderness: “Turn the stones into bread,” is the first temptation. “Throw yourself down from the Temple parapet, and when you are unharmed, people will flock to you in droves,” is the second. “See the cities of the world before you?” begins the third. “You can have power over all of these.” At every turn, Jesus draws on his inner resources, beyond the failings of his humanity. He was finding his antidote, a “bezoar” if you like, to overcome the temptations. And this resource was based on the truth of God’s Word, and the strength he gained from God’s presence.

Temptations are hard to bear. There is much that “weighs upon the heart.” *Our* bosom needs cleansed of “perilous stuff”. Jesus struggled with the brokenness of humanity. Wasn’t he fully immersed in the human condition? So he needed his antidote, his trust in the Word and the Way of God. As Lent continues for us, and we are more and more aware of our own brokenness, might we need to find an antidote too?

A prayer for today

I know well the failings of my humanity. What I need now is a way of coping. Amen

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