13th June 2026

Repentance

"But in the morning, cool repentance came."

Sir Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*

In the central courtyard of the wonderful Linlithgow Palace is an impressive fountain. Though the fountain is no longer active and has been altered over the years such that it will be quite different now from what it was in the 16th century, nonetheless, it has some interesting features.

One of these is an impressive carving of a well-dressed man, apparently looking boldly into the distance. However, as the signage explains, this man is not as he seems. For he is a penitent sinner. The clothes he wears, far from being impressive, are actually sackcloth, the garb of remorseful individuals, who debase themselves repentantly before God. And his headgear is not a fancy hat. It is a thick rope round the sinner's head, a visible sign of an intention to seek God's forgiveness and to perform public penance. It's often associated with the *capirote,* a conical hat that covers the face and is worn during Holy Week processions in Spain to indicate humility, anonymity, honesty and conversion. (Why does the Dunce's Cap come to mind, I wonder?)

I touched on the need for, and the importance of, penitence during Lent, as we prepared ourselves for the meaning of Easter. But is the need to be penitent over, now that Easter is long past? I think not! For are we not – or should we not be – as remorseful now as we ever were before?

I've never worn sackcloth, publicly debased myself in an act of penitence, worn a rope around my head or sported a *capirote* during a Holy Week procession or at any other time. And yet, am I not still a Dunce? Do I not need to recognise my mistakes, my foolishness, and make appropriate amends? A carving on a 16th century fountain was a salutary reminder of who I am and what I'm like. As I dress myself in my fine clothes and look boldly into the distance of my life, like the man depicted in an ancient palace fountain, I acknowledge that how I appear to others isn't the real me. For underneath is still the garb of the penitent sinner.

A cool repentance as Walter Scott suggests, and in the morning? Maybe. But however, or whenever, it is, the need for repentance remains, as it did for an apparently well-dressed man 500 years ago.

A prayer for today

Today, I recognise what I am, an imperfect individual, needing real forgiveness. Amen

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