

Gaddafi.....

Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi.

A name that has

literally stricken the hearts and lives of many, many people with terror.

A **name** that many people would identify with pure **evil**.

Hardly then

A suitable subject

for the celebration of All **Saints**.

And yet, (**paradoxically**)

it is appropriate

to mention it on **this day**

when we gather here to celebrate **Holiness**.

But I also wish to mention **another name**.....

Because today

.....is the anniversary of **Rose Macaulay's** death in 1958.

I am sure you know her books.

I first encountered her work

when (as a teenager)

I read 'The Towers of Trebizond..

I was amused and captivated

by the

famous opening line.....

' "Take my camel, dear", said my Aunt Dot,

as she climbed down from this animal

on her return from High Mass.'

The book was described in The New York Times as ;

"Fantasy, farce, high comedy,

lively travel material,

delicious japes at many aspects of the frenzied modern world.

A succession of illuminating thoughts

about love, sex, life,

organized churches and religion

are all tossed together with enchanting results."

The book follows the adventures of a group of people

- the narrator.... Laurie,
- the eccentricDorothea Ffoulkes-Corbett (otherwise known as Aunt Dot), and...
- her High Anglican clergyman friend..... Father Hugh Chantry-Pigg (who keeps his collection of sacred relics in his pockets).

They are travelling from Istanbul
(or Constantinople as Fr. Chantry-Pigg would have it)..... to Trebizond.

On the way, they meet magicians,
Turkish policemen
juvenile British travel-writers.

They observe the BBC and Billy Graham on tour.

Aunt Dot proposes to emancipate the women of Turkey
by converting them to Anglicanism
and popularizing the bathing hat.

But it is not all light-hearted.

On their return to London
a fatal car accident
brings the book to a **sad and unexpected** close.

.....
It is difficult to read this book
and not feel that Macaulay
knew something about **Holiness..**

There is a deep sadness
and wistful humour in The Towers of Trebizond.

This is what she writes about.....Aunt Dot,

*"She is a woman of dreams.
Mad dreams, dreams of crazy, impossible things.*

And they aren't all of conversion to the Church, oh no.

Nor all of the liberation of women, oh no.

Her eyes are on far mountains, always some far peak where she will go.

*She looks so firm and practical, that nice face, so fair and plump and shrewd,
but look in her eyes,
you will sometimes catch a **strange gleam.**"*

Macaulay felt the powerful attractions of **mystical** Christianity.

Perhaps because it is **her last**
(and I think **best**) novel....
the story is really about herself.

And this is why the book
has such a **heart-rendingly**
sad ending....

Rose Macaulay had a long affair with
Gerald O'Donovan
a married novelist
and a former Jesuit priest.

An affair that Macaulay could not give up,
It only came to an end in 1942
with O'Donovan's death.

The **real issue** in 'The Towers of Trebizond'
The **real issue** in Rose Macaulay's life...
(is not 'high churchery' or jolly japes)

.....it is **about Conflict.**
Spiritual and Moral Conflict in the Human heart.

Conflict.....

between a deep and genuine attraction to **mystical Christianity**
and
attraction to **someone** she loved with a deep and impossible passion.

Rose Macaulay was never a simple believer in "mere Christianity."

Her writings reveal a more complex, mystical sense of the Divine.

For much of her adult life she was an ardent **secularist**,
often treating Christianity satirically.

Only some years after Gerald's death,
did she return to the Anglican Church.

Yet...her experience reveals a great truth.

Conflict

so often goes hand in hand with **Creativity**.

And this is why
in **today's** Gospel Reading ..
Jesus
calls those caught up
in the **conflicts** of human existence...**blessed**.

The **Beatitudes**..

can seem wonderfully pious and worthy.

Wouldn't we all like to be
good, pure,
peacemakers and the rest?

Or would we?

I have to admit
that when I listen to Radio 4

I feel.... **I ought**
to feel very inadequate.....
compared to those fine individuals
leading the forces of democracy and human rights
in the dark places of our world.

But should I?

Is this what Jesus is talking about?

Are the 'politically correct'
and morally courageous...'poor in spirit'?

When we look a little closer at the list of virtues
that Jesus deemed 'blessed' ... 'happy'

we see that most of these virtues
are actually about 'a **lack** of something'.

The poor in spirit

Those who mourn

The meek

Those who hunger and thirst

Jesus seems to be saying
that those who are caught up
in the **conflict** between what **we are**
and what **we would like to be**.

These.....the inadequate
are the people to be called happy...

These are the **Bless-ed**
The **Be-loved** by God.

I began this sermon with a **terrible and un-holy** name.... Gaddafi.

A man,
who did terrible
utterly in-human
things to many, many human-beings.

This is where Evil has the advantage.

It is all-to-easy to see what **un**-holiness is.

But Holiness....

Ah thatis a **strange and elusive** thing...
because God can be strange and elusive.

Rose Macaulay...
and indeed many of the saints that the Church has canonised..
would never think of themselves as Holy.

Yet their longing for God..
their deep apprehension of the mystical..
seems to almost **grow out**
of the profound **moral conflicts** in their own lives.

Conflict and Creativity.

Holiness is not a **static** thing.

It is born of conflict.

It is born of inner warfare.

The struggle between our **intuitive** desire for God..
and our equally genuine **attraction**
to his creation
..... and his creatures.

It is in this very **imperfect** state
of wanting
desiring
that we do **glimpse our final goal...**
that we catch sight of Heaven.

That we do see from **afar...** the Towers of Trebizond.

It is in this state
of **not yet being**
but **becoming**
that Jesus calls us **Blest..** by God.

Happy indeed..
not because we **are** saints....

But because
for all our inadequacies
the very deepest **part** of us..... **longs** to be!