

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Twenty-third Sunday of the Year

'Revenge is a dish best served cold.' I saw recently that an American best-selling author had written a book offering wronged wives and lovers a host of ways to get even with the men who had let them down. It begins by saying that, 'The desire for revenge is an inevitable step on the road to recovery. Revenge is not a dirty word, it's a time honoured tradition. It's a way of bringing the scales of justice back into proper balance.' The book outlines hundreds of ways of seeking revenge, all said to be drawn from real-life incidents.

One woman called the Australian speaking clock from her ex-boyfriend's phone and then left the receiver off the hook for days while he was on holiday. He returned to a £6000 bill. The number to call is helpfully provided.

Another woman featured in the book alerted her ex-lover's boss that he had confided that much of his CV was pure invention. A third sold her ex-husband's Porsche for £30.

Other revenge tactics detailed include cutting the elastic waist band in all his underpants, cutting a small hole in the rear of his swimming trunks, and tearing out a few pages from his favourite books. The suggestion is also made of putting an Oxo cube in the shower head, placing an open can of sardines in a heating vent or replacing his haemorrhoid cream with Vick's Vapour Rub!

We have seen similar behaviour in arguments between neighbours. One man runs a bulldozer over another property or dumps five tons of horse manure on his neighbour's drive because of a dispute about the border of the property or his failure to cut down some offending trees.

Is revenge so sweet? Does it really settle our sense of justice? What does it really do to the person meeting it out? After all, new clothes and books can be bought to replace those which have been vandalised. I remain to be convinced that revenge heals wounds. It is much more likely to inflame the situation and extend the period before healing can take place.

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday our Lord is heard teaching his disciples about how to resolve disputes in the Christian community. This is part of what he had to say: *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."*

He goes on from there to outline what should happen if the dispute cannot at first be resolved and if reconciliation cannot at first be reached.

It's all about healing divisions within a community and trying to bring back the lost, the alienated and the disaffected. Our Lord calls his hearers to seek honesty and sincerity in all relationships, to put aside self-interest, anger and wounded pride in order to take those first, difficult steps in healing the rifts which can so easily destroy us.

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing. [1Peter 3:9]