

entertainers. He had been adopted into a poor family in Glasgow but, in his spare time after demobilisation, studied to become a barrister. Tony Blair was brought up as an Anglican but said he was not in any real sense practising until he went to Oxford, where there was an Anglican priest at his College who rekindled the religious spirit in him. Blair then met Cherie and they married in 1980. He related in a 2009 interview with L'Osservatore Romano, the papal newspaper, that he started going to Mass with her. He said that his path to Rome had taken 25 years, maybe longer, adding: *"Over time, emotionally, intellectually and rationally it became clear that the Catholic Church was the right home for me"*. Blair often wished to refer more to his Christian faith when PM but was advised against it. The most famous quote associated with him was when Alistair Campbell, his adviser, said: *"We don't do God"*. According to Campbell this was just a humorous way of curtailing a question about Blair's faith from a long-winded US interviewer. Freed from any perceived political restraint, in 2017 when Blair met Pope Francis who asked for his prayers, Blair responded: *"I always do, please pray for me too. I need your prayers,"* So ends this short series on converts. My own father converted after 28 years of marriage. I am sure that his positive affirmation of the Faith at the age of 50 had a strong influence on that of his then 14 year old son.

-Stephen. S

Entrance antiphon: Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me; save the servant who trusts in you, my God. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long.

First Reading: Isaiah 22:19-23

Responsorial Psalm: 137: Response: Your love, O Lord, is eternal, discard not the work of your hands.

Second Reading: Romans 11: 33-36

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. Alleluia!

Gospel: Matthew: 16: 13-20

Memorial Acclamation: We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

Communion Antiphon: The earth is replete with the fruits of your work, O Lord: you bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer the heart.



Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection: Converts: (3) 20th/21st century politicians: In the late 20th/ early 21st centuries, many Anglican clergymen converted to Rome,

largely inspired by the Anglican Church permitting women vicars and bishops. They were facilitated by the Personal Ordinariate established by Benedict XVI *"to allow Anglicans to enter into the full communion of the Catholic Church whilst retaining much of their heritage and traditions"*. A recent convert is the former Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, who in 2002 had been one of the final two candidates for Archbishop of Canterbury when Rowan Williams was appointed on the recommendation of Tony Blair. Tony Blair himself converted to Catholicism shortly after leaving the office of Prime Minister in 2007. He was not the first Prime Minister to have considered conversion. In his autobiography Harold Macmillan describes his friendship with Ronald Knox, his tutor before Oxford and whom he met again there: *"Ronald Knox ..,became one of my closest friends...though I had not followed him, as I was at one time much tempted to do, when he left the Anglican for the Roman Church..."* It seems that Macmillan's mother's views and the First World War came between him and Rome. In a letter to Knox before leaving for France, he had even written: *'I'm going to be rather odd. I'm not going to "pope" until after the war (if I'm alive).'*

Thereafter, no Prime Minister appears to have been 'troubled' by Rome until Tony Blair. His conversion was of long gestation. A Guardian headline somewhat cynically stated: *"After 30 years as a closet Catholic, Blair finally puts faith before politics"*. The news was not universally well received. On the day he converted, Blair met Ian Paisley and as a matter of courtesy gave him advance warning. Paisley's recorded reaction was: *".. I said 'you're a fool', and I walked on."* The reaction was perhaps unsurprising, particularly since Blair's maternal grandparents were Ulster Protestants - his grandfather butcher had been an Orangeman, and member of Carricknahorna Loyalist Orange Lodge 147. His father, Leo, was the illegitimate son of travelling