



One of the things that as a boy I always wanted to do was stand on my head, but I never could. Nor could I turn cartwheels. I was a chubby little boy lacking

natural balance so I never got to see the world upside down. My feet were always planted on the ground rather than waving in the air. As a boy, so as a man my feet have always seemed to be planted on the earth, and that, we are told, is as it should be, standing foursquare, planted, solid, secure. Nothing wrong with that at all, it's how we all say we should be. Well, I want to suggest that maybe standing foursquare, planted, solid, secure is in fact NOT how we should necessarily be.

Amongst the many things that St. Francis of Assisi did one appeals to me: he stood on his

head. Now I suppose once the saint had got used to the rush of blood to his brain he must have looked around and wondered at what he was seeing: trees growing down rather than up, rivers flowing up rather than down. All things upside down. As the saint looked on it is said that what he really saw was just how vulnerable was the world and everything in it. It is said that the saint saw that everything, absolutely everything, seemed to be held up by the finest of fine gossamer threads. That at any moment this thread might snap and everything would come tumbling down. And the saint saw one more thing; that the thread was held in place by God and by God alone, meaning that everything was dependent upon God and God alone. So that if God should take away his love and allow the thread to snap the whole kit & caboodle would come crashing down into a great chaos. And of course Francis was thought by most people in his time, including his own father, to be foolish beyond imagining. But they were wrong, for in fact, Francis was the wisest of men.

Francis had read & meditated upon the scriptures and had read the words of St. Paul used as our second lesson this morning, and he now saw clearly that indeed the wisdom of humankind is folly and the foolishness of God is 'wiser than human wisdom.'

In the gospel reading this morning we heard of Jesus beginning his visible ministry by going up to Jerusalem and causing a riot in the Temple as he whipped out the money changers and animal sellers. We look at that now as a jolly good thing for him to have done. Yet imagine if such a thing happened here in St. Martin's, or at the Cathedral or St. Peter's in Rome. It would be a scandal. 'He shouldn't have done that', we would no doubt say, 'if he thought it was wrong he should have worked with the Temple authorities and persuaded them to change their ways, not go barging about disrupting lives and interfering with services.' Now, I'm not suggesting for one moment that we should go about doing that, for we are not Christ, but I am suggesting that what we see Jesus doing is a prime example of the

foolishness of God. It is God's Son acting in a way far wiser than human wisdom, claiming back the Temple for God from wicked men who no doubt were standing foursquare, planted, solid and secure in their faith; that is, in their understanding not God's. St. Paul writes in the second lesson this morning of how 'a crucified Christ' is 'to Jews an obstacle' ... 'and to pagans madness.' Yet to us he is 'the power and wisdom of God'. But is he? Do we really believe in this message? Are we really convinced that God Most High was truly crucified and truly rose and truly ascended, so that we, and this is the really crucial point, so that we might follow him in what by any worldly wisdom is sheer folly and live by faith in God confident that no matter what, God will provide? Confident that God will keep that finest of fine gossamer threads that St. Francis saw safe from snapping? Are we convinced, truly?

This holy season of Lent is given us by the Church for us to renew our trust in the foolishness of God. Have we used it? Are we

reading our Lenten book? Are we reading our Lenten Bible? Are we following some Lenten study? Are we praying more prayerfully? Are we following Our Lord in the Way of the Cross? Are we preparing ourselves to make confessions of our sins before Easter? This is what Lent is given for to practice 'fasting, prayer and abstinence' that we may be enabled by grace to grow closer to Jesus. That we may by putting ourselves in the way of grace, as it were, cleave more closely to Jesus to allow his love of us to invade and infect our lives. For in the end that is what the Christian way of life is all about, Jesus' relationship with us and our allowing Jesus into our lives. And that is true foolishness, for to do that is to open ourselves out to the world as he did and we know what happened to him on Good Friday. But even more do we know what happened to him on Easter Day.

The foolishness of God is indeed more wise than the wisdom of humankind, for it leads to true and everlasting life. Pray that in this Lenten season you may be enabled by grace to know that

foolishness, to live that foolishness and so gain true wisdom, that is the life of Jesus in your life.

Amen