

## “The Passage of Time”

I was recently given a newly published book of old photos taken in various towns in Teesside and North Yorkshire at the turn of the nineteenth century, comparing how things used to look then with how they look now. Living in Whitby, I have quite a number of the pictures taken around the town between 1865 and 1910 by local photographer Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, and for a while I had equivalent views displayed next to them which I had taken to show comparisons of how those same views look today.

I really enjoy those sorts of comparative photos; it's just very interesting to see how much some things have changed and, on the other hand, which features have remained pretty much the same despite the passage of time.

You can look, for example, at an Edwardian family group walking along a street and reflect on the fact that in their wildest dreams they couldn't possibly have imagined how that street would look in a hundred years time. They couldn't have imagined for a moment the multi-storey buildings that would one day replace their shops and houses, much less the cars that would be driving along that street at speeds also beyond their imagination. For that matter why would such thoughts have even occurred to them as they quietly strolled along enjoying their Sunday afternoon “constitutional”?

It's the same with us. Can we even begin to imagine how our neighbourhoods and town centres will look a hundred years from now and the changes that might have taken place by then? It's almost impossible really; we simply have no idea, anymore than the Edwardians would have had. Imagination and reality are going to be worlds apart.

Despite all our hopes and plans, even our “dreams”, we have no idea what the future holds for us and it becomes an important test of our faith and trust in God that, ultimately, we are content to leave such things entirely in his hands. Only God knows what the future will bring and that should be good enough for us. At the same time it shouldn't stop us from musing and wondering, planning and dreaming, provided we retain a grip on the reality that our only *real* hope lies in God. We don't need to know what the future holds for us – God alone knows – and we leave such things solely in his hands and his providence.

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**I**t only seems five minutes since it was Christmas, meanwhile the six weeks of Lent have been and gone, so has Easter, and here we are already thinking about summer holidays! Where on earth does the time go?

**T**hey say that time seems to pass more quickly the older you get, but I'm not entirely convinced – and not just because I'm getting older! It seems to me that as you get older, and especially if you don't really want to face the fact, you would try even harder to savour the days as they come and go. Perhaps it's the savouring - making the best use we can of our time and keeping ourselves busy - that makes us less conscious of how time is passing. If we were bored or inactive maybe the days would pass more slowly. It's like when you go on a trip and getting there always seems to take longer than coming back. The anticipation of getting there, looking at everything along the way, seems to make the journey longer than when you are taking less notice, thinking about other things, on the way home.

**P**erhaps the reason why time seems to pass so quickly is simply that we are so busy - these days more than ever before. We have all sorts of commitments and demands on our time both within our homes and families and outside of them, often finding there just aren't enough hours in the day. Keeping busy and occupied is all very well, but does it come at a price? Are we giving the time we should to others? Are we giving the time we should to God? Do we have any quality time for ourselves, individually or as a family, which is what days off and the Sabbath rest used to be about?

**A**lso, in so many areas of our life, we are constant planning for the future. We move from one event to another, one activity to the next, diaries necessarily to hand. From my own point of view as a priest, I often feel that always having to anticipate and plan for the next church season on the calendar doesn't help the experience that time is flying by, but the danger for me and for all of us in planning constantly for the future is that we can miss out on the present. Today is the tomorrow we planned for yesterday but we never really appreciate it when it arrives because we're already planning for the next tomorrow!

**L**ife can start to feel like we're hanging on to the reins of a runaway horse. The question is: how can we regain control?

**I**n one of his songs, *Secret o' Life*, James Taylor says, "The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time" – not, of course, enjoying its passage but enjoying it *as* it passes. In other words life isn't just a journey from birth to death, it's about how we spend the time along the way. As Christians we would have to add that it is also about the purpose of our life, our ultimate goal, eternal life. While our sights are necessarily fixed on the future "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ", at the same time that awareness

and anticipation should bring our focus very much back to the present because it is in this world, in the here and now, that “we live and move and have our being”.

In her book *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*, Elisabeth Kübler Ross says:

It is the denial of death that is partially responsible for people living empty purposeless lives, for if you live as if you’ll live for ever, it becomes too easy to postpone the things you know you must do. You live your life in preparation for tomorrow or in remembrance of yesterday, and meanwhile each today is lost. In contrast, when you fully understand that each day you awaken could be the last you have, you take time *that day* to grow, to become more of who you really are.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it”. It’s the old adage about taking life one day at a time. *Carpe diem* – “seize the day”. The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time – making the most of the here and now. How can we slow down the horses?

Isn’t it a lovely ride, sliding down, gliding down?

Try not to try too hard. It’s just a lovely ride.

(James Taylor, *Secret o’ Life*)

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