

After Trinity

On the 2 Sundays after trinity I always breathe a prayer of thanksgiving and pray for
JIM FRENCH.

You have never heard of him, nor should you, but.....

In the "good old days" the two Sundays after Trinity probably had the worst sermons in the church's year and here's why. Most of us clergy used to be ordained on Trinity Sunday; nowadays the big ordinations have been moved to what they call Petertide. (St Peter is 29 June). The ordinations are actually in July usually around St. Thomas (3 July) but they are still called Petertide. **Please do not pursue this line of thought any further, it carries a health warning for any sane Anglican!** Having been ordained on Trinity Sunday it was inevitable that you would be told by your Vicar to preach on one of the two following Sundays. So the poor people had to endure the stumbling beginners' efforts all over the country. I remember finding the notes for my first sermon amongst a lot of other rubbish years ago. Not good!

Jim French was the senior, long-serving churchwarden; he was the treasurer; he was owner/manager of the local grocery, he was a great power in the church and community! I was the lowest of the low, the junior of a long series of juniors over the years and on the Monday after my first sermon I went, all innocent, into the shop to buy something trivial and the assistant said to me "Mr French would like to see you in his office.".

It was a bit like marching in as the accused to a court martial, without even the support of the traditional "prisoner's friend". *What had I said? Heresy?*

"you wanted to see me Mr French?"

"Ah yes Brother Hugh, I listened to your first sermon yesterday with interest. (Oh dear)....."

"I thought it was a very promising beginning" he said.

"Thank you very much, Mr French".

Over the years I have found this a most inspiring memory. He didn't say That was a wonderful sermon; I would have known it wasn't and he would have known it wasn't true.

He didn't say That wasn't much good; that would have been no help to either of us. What he said was respectful and encouraging and I have never forgotten it.

That parish was well known and used for training the newly ordained. I myself overlapped with at least 7 others. Jim French, I came to realise, probably said something equally encouraging to each one of us. The overall benefit to the preaching standard of the C of E must have owed much to that one man and his helpful positive comments. I am sure the Good Lord will have rewarded him according to his works, and we, his succession of junior curates, will rise up and call him blessed.

Or

May I again quote my own formidable Quaker grandmother?

"Thee should never speak unless thee has something good or necessary to say."

Or my own personal litany which would include

Blessed Jim French, pray for us.