

Blessed are they . . .

The forecast warns of persistent showers, heavy in places and winds moderate to strong. Not the best of days for my line of work. Nobody hangs about in that sort of weather, it's head down and get from A to B as quick as you can and don't look to right or left, and certainly don't stop for some old lady who tries to talk to you.

The text for the day is a bit of a let-down too. Proverbs 17:27: 'He who has knowledge spares his words.' It's hardly inspirational. The commentary underneath explains that this means keeping in check opinions that might spark anger in others. Buttoning your lip in other words. If we are truly wise we will think before speaking and only share insights likely to be helpful. Sounds more like something you'd get from the Buddhists or those two smart talkers I spoke to yesterday—The Brahma Kumaris. They had an answer for everything that pair. Said they would only take my tract on condition that I accepted one of their little cards. 'Talk to your mind. Tell it the good, sweet positive things of eternal truth.' What is that supposed to mean? It's like all that Eastern nonsense; they harp on about love and compassion and detachment but the one thing they never square up to is *sin*.

It's time I made a move. The rush hour's past so I can use my concessionary ticket. The flat's tidy and the breakfast dishes are stacked on the drainer; I'll put them away when I get back.

The lining of this coat is falling apart and I can't put anything in the pockets because of the holes, but as long as I keep it buttoned up it looks half respectable. One shoe has cracked across the sole. Thankfully, it hasn't started letting in yet.

A dense drizzle has just started and people are rushing to get out of the wet. They stream past me without stopping.

'Jesus loves you, Sister.'

The woman looks at me and then at the tract and withdraws her hand as soon as she sees what it is.

'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

One man is startled and stops and gapes at me for a minute, so I press the tract into his hand before he has the chance to escape. We have to save as many souls as we can.

'I am the way and the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me.'

A young girl, who looks like a lost soul, takes the tract before realising what it is and starts reading it as she moves away. She doesn't throw it on the ground or dump it in the nearest bin. Please, Lord, let her read it, I pray, open her eyes.

It looks as though she's waiting for someone. A pretty thing under all the make-up, but she'll catch her death wearing skirts that short. She roots in her shoulder bag, finds her mobile

phone, keys in a number and continues reading the tract as she waits for whoever she's calling to answer.

Hallelujah! Open her eyes, Lord, open her eyes.

She starts talking on the phone, then the corners of her mouth turn down and two furrows appear between her brows; someone's stood her up. She snaps the phone shut, throws it in her bag and looks around to get her bearings. The tract is still in her hand as she marches off up Sauchiehall Street.

The rain is heavier now and the crack across the sole of my left shoe has started letting in. My stomach is growling, another ten minutes and I'll stop for lunch. There's a nice little café just round the corner. Oh the spirit is willing, Lord, but the flesh is weak.

'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,' is the text on my next tract. And they say God doesn't have a sense of humour.

I'm lucky to get the last table for two, the rain has driven people indoors. The girl who took the tract is seated at a table just inside the door eating a burger and salad. I smile at her until I look down and see the tract wedged under a leg of the table.

She finishes her burger and salad but something must be caught in her teeth. She tries to dislodge it with her tongue and then with the long lacquered nail of her pinkie finger. Twice she extracts the nail and sucks her teeth with her tongue but whatever it is, it's still there and she can't stop until she gets it out. She digs a compact out of her bag and uses a finger to push back her top lip. I can see the culprit, it's a big black seed, probably from the dressing of her salad. The girl looks down at her neck and grabs a crucifix at end of its chain and starts digging between her teeth with one of the arms of the cross.

'Don't do that!'

Everyone stops eating and stares at me. The girl only realizes it was directed at her when she sees my horror-struck face. She looks around at the other customers and smiles.

'Don't do what?' she asks, looking at me as if I'm mad.

'Don't use your crucifix to clean your teeth.'

She smiles and looks at the crucifix like she's seeing it for the first time.

'Why not?'

'Why not! It's the symbol of our Lord's suffering! The price he had to pay to save us from sin.'

The girl smiles and looks at the crucifix again. 'Well you know what?' she says. 'It's a bloody toothpick now.'

The other young customers all start laughing and the girl shakes her head and resumes digging between her teeth with arm of the cross.

