

On Being Bored.

Once upon a time, I was inveigled into going to the opera. It was so boring! It went on for four hours! The seats were uncomfortable. You couldn't see very well. The words were in German, which I don't understand at all. I suppose the music was all right, but there was far too much of it!

So I fidgeted and moved around and engaged my neighbours in conversation. If I wasn't enjoying myself, I didn't see why anyone else should enjoy him or herself. In fact, I took out my resentment at being there by spoiling the opera for the other people who actually seemed to like it.

No, actually I didn't. Although I was bored and uncomfortable for four hours, I tried to keep still and I was quiet for the whole time! It was a question of good manners whatever I thought of the experience myself. What is more, on the bus home with the person who invited me and paid for my ticket, I tried hard not to spoil his enjoyment of the evening by telling him what I really thought of it, insofar as I could avoid doing so without actual lying in response to his eager questions.

So I find it hard to understand what sometimes happens at christenings and weddings and even funerals. You don't have to have your children christened or get married in church or have a Christian funeral. So I presume that people who do choose to do these things think that they are doing something meaningful. Quite often, however, other people present, their guests, seem to think that it is all a bit of a bore and talk through all the sacred parts of the service, move around and generally show no sensitivity to those for whom what we are doing is very important and extremely precious. I have never forgotten the young man chatting to his mates on his mobile throughout his father's funeral service. I should have thought that good manners and courtesy would make people want to respect both the immediate family of the person being baptised, the couple getting married or the deceased, and the people who come to Church regularly, faithfully and frequently. Without them, there would be no Church to christen children or to bless couples getting married or to pray for the bereaved. If a christening or a wedding or a funeral really matters, surely we should behave with respect. On the other hand, if we think it is all meaningless and we really don't want to be there, maybe we should leave it to those who do care to attend the service and just turn up later for the food and drink.

Don't get me wrong. Every sincere seeker is welcome in Church. We know that the way we do things may be unfamiliar to people and we're relaxed about people being unsure what is expected of them and doing things differently from the way we usually do them. We do understand that children may not always understand enough to behave well. We've all been children and many of us have had children. But, surely adults, even if they don't really want to be there, could respect those of us who do and, indeed, respect God, Whom we are asking to bless our families and our friends on these occasions.

Like me at the opera, we could try to sit still and remain quiet. Christenings are only one quarter the length of Der Rosenkavalier and weddings and funerals are usually less than that. It also occurs to me that, had I really tried to pay attention to the opera, I might have discovered why it means so much to some other people, who are perhaps more perceptive than I am. Roger Knight, Rector of Cuxton & Halling.