

## Views from the Pews - How pure is distilled water?

I should not be laughing, but I am. I have just been lazy enough to use an internet platform to play with definitions of purity. Because this is a pew sheet and not merely a carnal column, I narrowed the search by including the word Bible. I ended up with fifty New Testament texts selected by A. N. Onymous. Oh OH! Most of the references confused purity with ethics and morality. Only nineteen of the fifty included the word purity, and eight of those were in its negative – impurity. Most equated impurity with sex –just don't do it- or with drink – water good, wine bad - even though we know who deliberately changed water into wine. Scary, that.

I was laughing because all I wanted was to find an appropriate text to illustrate Choral Eucharist with the Dio Choir. That service was the most exquisitely beautiful definition of purity in all its aesthetic, and practical, senses, and interpreted the Mass with an unique clarity and freshness. 'Purity' is one of those words which is best defined by equivalent example, or by sensory experience, rather than words. Distilled water for example, has a scientific definition of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. In a purely(sic) sensory analogy, how-ever, two or three drops of pure distilled water in a single malt turns it from the merely pleasurable into the ultimately focussed gustatory experience.

On Sunday, then, we had an unforgettable aural definition. The Diocesan choir arrived in force, filled the Choir behind the Sanctuary where acoustic purity in St Peter's magnifies both the best and the worst and began the service with the Introit, a setting of *The Lord's My Shepherd* by the remarkable Angela Smith. Mediated by the Dio Choir, we could actually hear the words. That was great, but the musicality with which those words came through was untarnished by tonal slippage, by harmonic irregularity, even by mistiming. The sound was as pure as distilled water, but with that human, individual,

vocal timbre which the poor old electronic piano lacks, seriously so. Then, in the final section of the introit, something remarkable occurred. Instead of the choir sopranos embellishing the beauty, Dio flautist Isabelle Stiles played a descant. Such purity of tone, such purity of balance, such purity of experience. What a welcome to the Cathedral. What an introduction to the service. What a gift from the girls of the choir.

*Sam Edwards*