



The Veneziana: Venice in Peril

When I was a child, back in the 1980s, there was great concern that Venice was falling into the sea. And the general consensus was that this exquisite example of human civilisation should not be allowed to go that way. And so the 'Venice in Peril' fund was born.

Fast forward a decade and a half, when I was in one of my first jobs as a market researcher, I was set to work on a project on Corporate Social Responsibility. When members of the public were asked for what examples they could give of a business going out of its way to support a charity, the most common answer, believe it or not, was Pizza Express, which an unfathomable number of people seemed to know supported the *Venice in Peril* fund to the tune of 25p whenever someone ordered a Veneziana pizza.

Venice sinking under the waves is something that has been foreseen. When did Pizza Express start their campaign on it? Forty years ago.

And yet here we are, with St Mark's Square under the worst flood since 1923 or something.

'Something must be done,' and not just sell more Venezianas.

It seems so obvious, but it is not as if the issue of global warming has not been touched upon in the last few years. Al Gore released his film, 'An Inconvenient Truth' in 2006, fully thirteen years ago, and yet progress on this issue has been limited.

Perhaps that's harsh. After all, solar and wind generated electricity has made gigantic strides. But carbon dioxide in the atmosphere keeps rising.

I wonder if part of the difficulty is the difficulty humans have in processing the 'slow and inexorable'. Sea levels have gone up, on average, 4mm a month for the last ten years. And who can notice a millimetre's difference? But if you add up a hundred gradations of 4mm, it comes to quite a lot, especially as it'll surely be followed by a further two hundred, even if we all move to electric cars by 2040.

This is the dilemma behind the phrase 'climate emergency'.

It is both true and untrue. It is an emergency in that the future of billions of humans (and of course animals) are at stake. It is not an emergency in the sense that nothing particularly needs doing in the next ten minutes, unlike the normal use of emergency. i.e. your house is on fire, you need to live NOW.

If Venice falls into the waves, no one can claim that we didn't see it coming. You even saw it coming as you bought your pizza on a Friday night. The really troubling thing is that you saw it coming but in the end you couldn't be bothered to do anything about it, because, well, in the end, it's only Venice, and Vanuatu, and Bangladesh, and Norfolk, and Walton on Thames and Surbiton's river roads... oh yes.

Sept 2019 Thought. for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.