

WEEKLY SERMON

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An Englishman's thoughts on Diego Maradona

As a middle-aged Englishman I must admit that I have a somewhat complicated attitude to Diego Maradona. On the one hand I recognise that he was the outstanding footballer of his generation – and arguably the greatest player of all time. It was impossible not to admire the skill and beauty of his play when he was in his heyday in the 1980s.

But, on the other hand, I find it impossible to forget that he cheated England out of the 1986 World Cup quarter final. His notorious 'Hand of God' goal when he clearly punched the ball past Peter Shilton, the England goalkeeper, still sticks in the craw.

So, I find complicated thoughts coming to mind at the recent news of Maradona's death at the age of 60. There was so much to admire and yet other things to decry.

But surely, it's not just my thoughts that are complicated, it's Maradona himself. One newspaper feature has described the two sides of Maradona like this: "He was blessed and cursed." (His many flaws became well known over the years and don't need repeating here.)

Some words spoken by Job seem to sum up Maradona's life: "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not." (14:1,2)

There was so much in Maradona to admire and praise – he was like the glory of a beautiful flower blooming; but at the same time troubles were evident and his days turned out to be few.

But aren't we all like Maradona?

Beautiful and yet troubled. Blessed and yet cursed. Glorious and yet sinners. If we look, each one of us will see snatches of Maradona in our complicated selves.

So what's to be done? The 1662 Prayer Book Funeral Service gives us the answer – and this is especially appropriate for the approaching season of Advent.

Just before the committal, the Minister quotes Job's words and reminds the congregation: 'In the midst of life we are in death'.

And then comes this prayer of repentance for us all: "Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee."

Through faith in Christ there is forgiveness for even the most complicated of sinners.

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