

Maundy Thursday 2019

Something fundamental has changed.

Coming to church is no longer normal.

On Sundays, normal people go shopping, play football, or simply go to work.

People still have a spiritual side, but they are more likely to express their spiritual side by digging allotments, going for a run, or indulging in some yoga.

And we have changed, too. The Church we were baptised into, however many years ago that might have been, is very different from the Church of 2019.

How do we respond to this new environment in which we now find ourselves? Let us listen once more to the testimony of St Paul: *This is what I received from the Lord and in turn passed on to you! That on the same night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread.....and said, "This is my body".*

This is very stark, very definite, very in your face, no room for compromise here.

"This is my body, which is for you." Do we believe this? And it's this issue of fundamental belief that is, I think crucial.

We, Catholics, are supposed to be missionary disciples – not just the clergy and the occasional catechist – but every single baptised Catholic.

We come to Mass not just to **receive** the Body of Christ. We come to Mass to **be** the Body of Christ.

"This is my body which is for you." – not just a duty or an obligation, but a joy and a pleasure, an act of love and being loved.

So that was point No 1 of my vision for the parish – becoming missionary disciples.

No 2 is about being much more open and welcoming. Every time we celebrate Mass, the priest says this: *"Take this **all** of you and drink from it. For this is the chalice of my blood...which will be poured out for you and for **many**."*

The very word Catholic means universal, for everybody. Many of you do make a point of welcoming new people to our church. But there is so much more we could do, specific ways of helping each other feel really at home within our community.

No 3 of my vision is summed up by the Washing of Feet. *"If I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an*

example, so that you may copy what I have done to you." For too long the Church has been seen as standing in judgement over others. Standing in judgement has got to be replaced with serving, entering into dialogue and working alongside.

So, a threefold vision: missionary disciples; welcoming; serving

Tonight, is the Passover of the Lord. The old order is passing. The new is beckoning us forward. "I am the Lord."

The cup of salvation I will raise;

I will call on the Lord's name.

Good Friday

"Who are you looking for?" It's not enough to come to Mass Sunday by Sunday, or even day by day. It's not enough to venerate the Cross, to pray the Divine Office or to recite the Rosary every day. It's not enough to be a priest, a deacon or a catechist. Outward appearance must give way to a life of the Spirit deep within.

"Who are you looking for?" What is your life for? What do you want more than anything else? What are your deepest desires? *"Who are you looking for?"* Our prayer has to start from where we are now, not from where we would like to be, or from where we think we might be in a few years' time. It's about you. It's about being true to who I am at the deepest level, here and now.

"I was born for this; I came into the world for this; to bear witness to the truth!" We live in a post-truth society. *"Truth? What is that?"* Pontius Pilate is uncannily contemporary. We prefer to avoid the truth, to skate over the truth, to stick with the everyday and superficial rather than confront things we find uncomfortable and disturbing. Again, we need to dig deep, we need to engage, we need to be set free.

"Woman, this is your son." Then to the disciple, he said, *"This is your mother."* All prayer is deeply personal. He's dying on the Cross and he's talking to his own mother. Behold your son, behold the one you bore, the one you suckled. This is powerful and emotional stuff. When we pray, we don't just use our heads or our voices, we use our hearts and our feelings.

Then to the disciple he said, "This is your mother". Prayer is deeply personal but that is not the same thing as being individualistic. Prayer is about relationships, engaging with one another at the deepest level, making our confessions to one another, breaking bread with one another, anointing each other with the oil of gladness.

And to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said, "I am thirsty". To pray is to thirst. To pray is to cry out for the one and only thing that can give you life, the one and only thing that satisfies, the one and only thing that will give us joy. To pray is to identify with every other human soul throughout the world and throughout history. We are all thirsty. Jesus is thirsty. God is thirsty. Feel the thirst. Cry out with thirst. Pray the thirst.

"It is accomplished." Our praying actually accomplishes something. Our praying actually does a particular piece of work. Our praying actually contributes to the redemption of the world. We share with Jesus. We share *the sufferings he bore...the sorrows he carried*. We, too, are *pierced through*. We, too, offer our lives *in atonement*. All the suffering, all the injustice, all the evil we encounter is offered up in sacrifice. And, in being offered up, is transformed for *eternal salvation*.

So, what is prayer for our 21st Century?

Prayer must start from where we are.

Prayer must engage the Truth.

Prayer is both deeply personal and deeply relational.

Prayer is being thirsty.

Prayer is to redeem the world.

See, my servant will prosper, he shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights.

It is to this lifting up, to this exaltation that all our prayer is directed in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the salvation of the world."

Easter

A French cathedral up in flames, the total shambolic mess we call Brexit, and a Pope and an ex-Pope in open disagreement, what sort of Easter message is that?

According to St John, early in his ministry, Jesus said this: *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up"*.

It is not rebuilding our temples and cathedrals brick by brick, and not by ever more intense and detailed political negotiations, that we will find future hope. For true hope we must look above and beyond.

We human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. We have work to do in this world. We have responsibilities. But for our own sanity and health we must look beyond this world.

With Moses we must make an Exodus from the slavery and drudgery of this world to the peace and joy of the Promised Land.

"Why look among the dead for someone who is alive?" When the women come to the tomb early their eyes are lowered. They are stuck in the complexities and problems of this world. *"He is not here; he has risen."* He is not to be found in bricks and mortar or in the bickerings of politicians and churchmen. *"he has risen."*

Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died and now the life you lead is hidden with Christ in God.

Here is a vision for our world.

Communism and Fascism don't work. Liberalism and Capitalism don't work. Socialism and Utilitarianism don't work. Nothing will work unless we raise our sights above and beyond. A world that tries to exclude God and to trivialise the sacred can only end in disaster.

Life on earth needs the perspective of heaven. Our feeble human attempts at peace and justice need the strength of God's Holy Spirit.

Two members of our Journey in Faith programme have seen this vision. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation they will embark/have embarked on their Exodus. They have raised their eyes to heaven and have set their course for the Promised Land. And we look forward to the children of Year 6 embarking on their journey in a month's time with Bishop William.

When Jesus said "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,*" the people of the time completely misunderstood him, and St John felt the need to add *but he was speaking of the temple of his body*. This is our vision of the world – the body of Jesus. The body of Jesus pierced through for our sins; the body of Jesus nailed to the Cross; the body of Jesus risen from the dead and now seating at the right hand of the Father.

Here is truth, here is hope, here is love. Here is our vision for the world.

*Truly, God is my salvation
I trust, I shall not fear.*