

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL – EASTER 6 2019 CATHEDRAL EUCHARIST.

St. John 14 v 23 Jesus said 'Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid'.

Like many of you over the years I have attended a goodly number of farewell presentations for people retiring after years of service in a particular post or moving on to other work. I have been privileged to present a whole variety of gifts, not a few garden chairs, vouchers for exotic holidays and of course, cheques and if appropriate bouquets of flowers and then invited to say a few words in tribute, a task I have to admit was sometimes easier to do for some than others. At such farewell gatherings quite often someone will say to the person looking forward to a new challenge or their pension, we don't know how we are going to manage without you. Who can possibly do all that you have done? Similar thoughts pass through the mind of the one left when a wife or husband dies. What am I going to do? How shall I manage without my life's partner? Cooking and bill paying!

The Gospels give us the impression that Jesus' disciples were, on the whole, not quick to grasp the implications of what he was saying to them. That

should be a great encouragement to those who teach the fact that what a brilliant teacher like Jesus taught was not always understood by his disciples. From time to time one of them would ask for an explanation. This morning's Gospel reading follows such a question from the other Judas, not Iscariot, as to why Jesus had revealed himself to them and not to the world. I cannot help thinking that surely by the Last Supper on the night before Jesus died, the disciples must have begun to wonder what was going to happen if their Lord was taken from them as he had warned them he would be. We heard how Jesus addressed the critical question of how would they manage when his physical, his mortal life was ended? As it were, He anticipated how they might feel on the evening of Good Friday when all seemed lost. Whether, as they listened to Jesus, they grasped what He was saying remains an open question. His words, as recorded in the Gospel, certainly became a reality after they experienced their risen Lord.

Having identified Himself with the Father, Jesus made them the solemn promise that they and all who accepted His love would not be left alone but would receive from the Father, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate to teach them and to remind them of what He had given them. Jesus' ministry was bound, as we are, by the limits of time and space. His itinerant ministry was

confined to an area not much bigger than Wales. But the good news of the Kingdom of God, the promise of new and eternal life, the hope provided by His resurrection from the dead were for the whole world.

God's love is not for one chosen race but for all humanity. The answer to the question how were the followers of Jesus, in other words the Church, going to manage is that they will be inspired, guided and strengthened by God's Holy Spirit. God was uniquely revealed to us in history in Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary. In Him we see the love of God at work. It is his love by which we seek to live, his teaching we take for our guide. If we allow the Holy Spirit to be our Advocate, our support, then Jesus promises not a life free of challenges but a serenity, peace. 'My peace I leave with you'. I admit it is not always easy to get rid of our fears which take different forms for each of us. That is because we have not yet fully learned to put our complete trust in God, to seek his help that we may live in his way, even when voting in a controversial election, and then, acknowledging that ultimately nothing can separate us from the love of God. His Spirit is with us to inspire, strengthen and empower us.

It was that gift of the Holy Spirit as we heard in our first reading which led St Paul and the first Christians

to risk their lives to proclaim the risen Lord across the known world. I suspect that for some of us what were then known as R.I, Scripture or Divinity lessons made much of the journeys of St. Paul. At the back of most copies of the King James version of the Bible was a coloured map showing his progress around the Ancient World. They were often more like geography lessons which failed to capture the sense of adventure and courage shown by Paul and his companions as our first reading described. Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit they crossed to Macedonia, reaching Philippi where they looked for the Jewish community but finding no synagogue, knowing the practice of such communities in places alien to their faith, they found a group of women by the river, 'God fearers', those not totally incorporated into Judaism. It is interesting, given our knowledge of the social norms in those days to find the key person in the response to Paul's efforts was an immigrant woman trader of considerable means. It must have been quite a challenge for Paul. Lydia, (and in a way that was typical for many centuries, not least in the conversion of the S. Saxons, Sussex by St. Wilfrid), Lydia and her whole household were baptised together. Her acceptance of the Gospel and St. Paul's acceptance of her commitment is then cemented by her offer and his acceptance of hospitality. A house church was formed in Philippi and today it is through such house

churches that the Christian faith survives in China and other countries where Christians are persecuted.

St. Paul faced many challenges and so do we in Britain today. Day in and day out a critical, not to say hostile media points up, not only the inadequacies of politicians but the failure of both churches and their leaders. It all seems so negative. I could help noticing how last weekend TV news made much of the likely failure of the new summer rail timetable but not a mention on Tuesday because presumably things going smoothly was not worthy of comment. In church life, sadly scandals occur but unreported goes the faithful Spirit inspired service of Christian people bringing community and hope to many on the margins of society. Given the pressures it is not surprising that some lose heart, drift away, forget the power of the Spirit to transform lives and situations for good.

We need to recover our confidence. That will need to be rooted in prayer, that the Holy Spirit which Christ promised his followers may bring the renewal not only to the Church but of society. To help us do that the Abps. of Canterbury and York have called for ten days' of focussed prayer for 'Thy Kingdom come' from next Thursday, Ascension Day until Pentecost. Our Lord promised to fill us with His Spirit so that we might be supported in proclaiming His Kingdom. He

gave us the Church, one another, to provide solidarity, fellowship for the challenges that Christian must face to live the Gospel which challenges by love.

This 'Thy Kingdom come' initiative provides us with an opportunity in prayer to renew our commitment so that this cathedral, through those who worship here, those who make it their spiritual home, may be a place of warm hospitality where faith in the Risen Christ is shared, troubled hearts and confused minds are calmed and shattered lives renewed because the peace of the Risen Lord permeates its life.