

Puy de Serre Trinity 12 2023

Those who were in church last week in Vouvant may have recognized today's readings which were read there by mistake but it is good to repeat the old, old story of Jesus and His love. Jesus says to His disciples, and to us this morning. "Who do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Peter replies and Jesus tells him this revelation is from God and that he is Peter, the rock upon whose faith He will build His church, and we, by the same grace of God, have come to share that faith in Jesus, with all those Christians who have been before us and will come after us.

But faith is a journey. With the help of the Holy Spirit we change and grow to understand more of God's love for us and for the world in Jesus, to become more like Him and better able to share His love with others.

Peter, like us, had a lot to learn. Within minutes Jesus would call Him Satan as he refused even to consider the possibility that Jesus, the Messiah would suffer and die. He believed in the Messiah of Isaiah's prophecy we have just heard, who would save and restore His people. He had to learn that God often does not do things in the way we think He should. By the grace of God he saw His glory revealed in Jesus on the mountain of the Transfiguration but he had to learn that to follow Jesus through the valley of suffering. When Jesus did suffer and die, though he had boasted he would die with Him, he denied Jesus three times, just as Jesus said he would. When the Risen Jesus asked him by the shores of the sea of Galilee, three times if he loved Him, three times he was compelled to face the reality that, again like us, his faith was weak and fearful, and yet, the love and mercy of God was shown to him, as Jesus forgave and restored him. "Feed my sheep." To Peter was given the grace and the responsibility to preach to the Gentile, Cornelius, overcoming a lifetime of prejudice against Gentiles, and to see the Holy Spirit fall on him and his household, just as it had on him and the other disciples on the Day of Pentecost. And yet in spite of this, and the decision of the Council of Jerusalem, that God had welcomed Gentiles into Christ's kingdom and they were not required to become Jews first, he still distanced himself from

eating with Gentile converts when some Jewish Christians who refused to accept this decision were present with him in Galatia.

Peter and we, during our time on earth, are God's work in progress, none of us perfect, all capable of making mistakes and even, at times, deliberately doing wrong, but still loved by Christ the Son of the Living God who calls us to repent and know we are forgiven.

I love the story of Thomas who for some reason wasn't there when the risen Jesus appeared to the rest of the disciples. He refused to believe until he has touched Jesus' wounds and put his hand into His side. Jesus out of love for him returned the following week and allowed him to do so. "My Lord and my God," says Thomas. How often can we feel that others are more blessed and we excluded. Yet here, in our Communion service, if we have the faith to believe it, we too may touch Christ's wounds in the bread and wine and hear Him tell us to feed His sheep, as we feed on Him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

So how do we respond to the wonder of God's love for us in Jesus Christ? Paul in our epistle gives us the answer. By offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. Jesus teaches us to pray that God's will be done in our lives. We live for Him and we believe that in the power of His Holy Spirit Jesus lives in us. He is making us slowly but surely more like Him, giving us His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control – the fruit of the Spirit. Our chief means of serving God is to reflect the love of Jesus who in His beauty and His power is the joy and inspiration of our lives.

But there is more – with God there always is – for God's love and purpose is not all about us. We are only a small part, and it is by grace that we are privileged to be a part, of His Body the church. Yes, each of us has gifts, some more than others, but all are given for the benefit of everyone, and all need to be valued and used for God's glory. And, lest we forget, Paul in the next chapter reminds us that the greatest gift of all is love. How could it be otherwise? God is love, and those who live in love, live in God and God lives in them. Jesus commands us to love one another as God loves us, and that includes forgiving one another as God forgives us, again as Jesus teaches us in the Lord's prayer.

Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love does not insist on its own way, it is not self centred, it is not angry, it keeps not record of wrongs, it does not rejoice in evil but rejoices in truth. It always trusts, always protects, always hopes and always perseveres

So how do we respond to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" With humble and thankful hearts because, by the grace of God, we have come to know Jesus the Son of the Living God who loves us, died for us, lives within us and will one day call us to be with Him, in the company of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, our brothers and sisters in Christ. And by joining together at the end of our service in the prayer based on our epistle reading in offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice to be sent out into the world to live and work to His praise and glory.

May those we meet today, and every moment of our lives, take note of us, that we have been with Jesus, and feel through us the touch of His love. As Pope Francis said recently at the closing of the Young People's World Conference in Lisbon, "may we shine with the reflected glory of Jesus as we listen to Him and serve Him in joy and without fear." Amen