

Trinity 4 Puy de Serre 9/7/2017

Gen 24 34-38; Rom 7 15-25a; Mt 11 16-19, 25 end

I am beginning to feel like the vicar in the apocryphal story to whom it is alleged one of his parishioners said, 'Oh vicar, we didn't know anything about sin, until you came here.'

For the third week running we find Paul wrestling, this week literally, with sin and this in spite of knowing that he is justified by faith through Jesus Christ.

Most of us find it easy to see the sins in other people and we often feel that all that they need to do is to understand and behave as we do for everything that is wrong with them to be put right.

This what motivated Paul, Saul as he was then, to persecute Christians. He, as a strict Pharisee knew exactly what God was like and how He should be worshipped. Jesus and his followers were blasphemers and so it was right they should be arrested and killed.

Only after his meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road, which left him blind so that he could come to see the truth, did he realise that he needed forgiveness for his own sins.

We see in Romans 5 that he knows that he is justified by faith and therefore has peace with God through Jesus Christ. In chapter 6 he sees baptism as dying with Christ to sin and being raised with Christ to new life, here on earth and the promise of life in heaven when we die.

Through our baptism – our acceptance of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour – we are set free from slavery to sin and we are called to serve Him.

But Paul realises that we continue to sin. As a Jew who worshipped God as a Pharisee he has inherited the Law, the 10 Commandments, telling him how to relate to God and his fellow human beings. The commandments confront him with a standard of behaviour which, try as he might he just cannot achieve. In summary they urge him, and us, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves. I often say that on a bad day,

and we all have them, I can't even love myself, so God and my neighbour don't have much of a chance.

Paul sums it up graphically. The good that I want to do, I do not do, but the evil I do not want to do, that I do. This leads him to describe himself as wretched and in need of rescue.

I think he speaks for all of us. Fortunately, God has provided His own escape plan, His own rescuer, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, whom we call our Saviour. Thanks be to God.

But we need to recognise our need of rescue and accept God's salvation. And for some people, that is not easy.

What sort of God do we believe in? Adrian Plass spent much of his earlier years thinking of God as a cross between a bank manager and a strict headmaster. He always felt in God's presence as if he had exceeded his credit limit or failed to do his homework. It took the grace of God to teach him that God actually likes him, even loves him.

Our gospel reading shows people's reactions to John the Baptist and to Jesus himself. Both were condemned by some of their contemporaries, one for being too severe and demanding – he has a demon and the other, who is God Himself, for being a glutton, a drunkard and a friend of sinners.

As we struggle in our own lives, trying to follow Jesus as good disciples it is comforting that all our readings today remind us that God has a purpose for all of us and that He will work it out if only we will trust Him.

We have been following the story of Abraham and Isaac, the long awaited child of God's promise. Last week we saw how God provided an alternative sacrifice in place of Isaac and today we see how He provides a wife for him, not from the local tribes, but from his own people. Abraham's servant is guided to the right place and the right person, the one of God's choice and He has prepared her heart to accept the proposal and trustingly leave her home and family to go and marry someone she has not met.

The marriage will not be perfect. When their twins are born, Isaac will love Esau more than Jacob and Rebekah will love Jacob more than Esau. She will deliberately deceive her husband to rob Esau of his father's dying blessing and in so doing she will divide the family and lose the presence of Jacob whom she loves, never to see him again. Nevertheless God will work His purpose out in spite of their sin.

He does the same for Paul. Jesus is the only answer to the problem of his sin, and ours. The 10 Commandments help us to realise our shortcomings and need of forgiveness. The Holy Spirit teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, who died for us, taking away all our sins, past, present and future. All we have to do is to receive Him, God's present of love and forgiveness and the promise of eternal life in heaven, with grateful hearts.

Jesus gave a wonderful visual aid to his disciples, though they didn't understand it at the time, and to us who by the grace of God have begun to, when He took the bread and wine at the Last Supper identifying them with his death for us and urging us to remember it when we take part in the Holy Communion.

As we take bread and wine in remembrance of Him we are assured that because He died for us our sins are forgiven. We give Him our sins and need of forgiveness and He in return clothes us with His righteousness and fills us with His Holy Spirit as we feed on Him in our hearts by faith.

Or, as the beautiful picture, at the end of our gospel invite us to believe, we come to a loving Jesus who knows we are weary and heavy laden and He takes us into His arms and gives us rest.