

Living the Word

Philippians 1. 20-24, 27

What does it mean for us to proclaim the life, death and resurrection of Our Lord? Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi begins by telling us a little of his own idea, that whether he lives or dies, his bold speaking about the Gospel truth will cause God to be exalted. Today's Church of England faces problems that Paul might not have envisaged: paying the Parish Share; trying to raise money for the church roof; churches being less full on a Sunday than they used to be. It is hard for us to keep in mind that these difficulties that we face at the moment are as nothing in comparison to the difficulties faced by those whose lives were threatened in the earliest days of the faith, and those who today face persecution and the threat of death, simply for proclaiming Christ crucified. How often does our faith in Christ fail to define us? How many times have we really been telling people about this Good News? Surely, it is the most important thing we can do whilst we still have breath.

Saints and Heroes

St Pio of Pietrelcina

Wednesday 23rd September is the feast of one of the best loved saints of the 20th century – St Pio of Pietrelcina, more commonly known as Padre Pio. He was an Italian Franciscan Friar who had decided to dedicate his life to God at the age of 5. He entered the novitiate at the age of 15, but ill health hampered his studies.

He experienced the stigmata (the marks of the nails in the hands and feet of Jesus). The experience was painful for him but he offered his suffering to God, and although the

wounds wept throughout his life they never became infected. News of this miracle spread and thousands of people flocked to his monastery for Mass and to hear him preach. He had a remarkable ministry of hearing confessions, and would do so for many hours each day. He would often counsel people to 'pray, hope, and don't worry' - wise words indeed.

From the Fathers

The householder said to them: 'I wish to give to this last one as I give even to you'. And since the obtaining of his Kingdom comes from his good will, he properly adds, "Or am I not allowed to do what I wish?" It is always foolish to question the goodness of God. There might have been reason for loud complaint if he did not give what he owed but not if he gives what he does not owe. And so he adds, "Or is your eye evil because I am good?" But no one should boast of his work or his time, when after saying this Truth cries out: "So the last will be first and the first last". We know what good things we have done and how many they are; we do not know with what exactitude our judge on high will investigate them. Indeed, we must all rejoice exceedingly to be even the last in the kingdom of God.

From 'Forty Gospel Homilies 19.4' by Gregory the Great, Bishop, c. 540-604

20th September
2020

The Fifteenth
Sunday after Trinity
25th Sunday
of the Year

The Last will be First



"Well, I'll go to the foot of our stairs!" It's an old-fashioned saying that is just another way of saying that we are surprised about something. But why go to the foot of the stairs?

"I see it's raining over our Aunt Dolly's." Again it's a double-edged sword, this one – it might be raining in the distance, but who on earth is Aunt Dolly? Do you even have an Aunt Dolly??

Similarly, Scripture is full of 'wise saws and modern instances' as Shakespeare would have put it – they have a meaning, however obscure, and yet their very intention evokes more questions than resolutions.

'The last will be first, and the first will be last' seems to be one of the most unfair assessments of the status quo and one which perhaps can be the most misleading statements of fact. Just because someone showed initiative and enthusiasm and was there first, what if the one chosen last has greater needs and has not shown that on the outside? Conversely, what if the one who is first got there by deception or dishonesty - does that qualify them to be in front, let alone have the right to condemn those further down the line?

So what is this parable really about? Arrogance? I was here first, so there! Greed? I worked more hours than he did, so I should get more! Or patience, humility and forbearance – their needs may be greater than mine.

But here's another saying to ponder on – Think before you speak!