

Sunday 21 June 2020, Second Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are worth nothing: send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you. Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING Jeremiah 20:7–13. Jeremiah cried out: O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him." But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten. O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

PSALM 69:8–11, 18–20 R In your great mercy, answer me, O God. Surely, for your sake have I suffered reproach, and shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my own kindred, an alien to my mother's children. **R** Zeal for your house has eaten me up; the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me. I humbled myself with fasting, but that was turned to my reproach. **R** Answer me, O Lord, for your love is kind; in your great compassion, turn to me. Hide not your face from your servant; be swift and answer me, for I am in distress. Draw near to me and redeem me; because of my enemies deliver me." **R**

SECOND READING Romans 6:1b–11. Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

GOSPEL Matthew 10:24–39. Jesus summoned the twelve and sent them out with the following instruction: "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

POST COMMUNION Loving Father, we thank you for feeding us at the supper of your Son: sustain us with your Spirit that we may serve you here on earth until our joy is complete in heaven, and we share in the eternal banquet with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday Homily 21 JUNE 2020

“Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 10:39

Many of us will remember the UK TV sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances*, whose heroine Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced “Bouquet”!) took to new heights the activity of being seen to be doing, wearing or saying the right thing. The reason it was funny, of course, was that nearly everyone knew someone with a bit (or a lot) of Hyacinth in them. How many of us, as children, were exhorted by our mother always to wear a clean pair of underpants in case we were knocked down? Surely children everywhere have puzzled over this concern for our underwear. Was keeping up appearances more important, even, than our health and safety? We may feel we live in a less formal society now but, in honesty, we’ve all felt the pressure of keeping up appearances from time to time, whether it’s trying to say the politically correct thing, or being seen by our friends to have the right type of organic, fair-traded or non-airfreighted food in our cupboards. Oh, these are all good things, but let’s be honest – there is a fine and rather blurry line between being a decent and upstanding member of society and being seen to be one. The pressure to keep up appearances is still there; it always is.

And so it was in first-century Palestine too. There were strict codes of behaviour that had the double-edged effect of both helping people to operate as good citizens by defining what was bad and what was good, but also excluded and labelled those who fell foul of these rules. Jesus upset the applecart, and as a result many vilified him as a lout and troublemaker. His behaviour was seen as defiantly antisocial, and he suffered both verbal and physical persecution as a result. And so we join the story today at the point where Jesus begins to prepare his disciples to carry on his work (a foretaste, of course, of the task of every Christian), and to suffer the same things that he suffered. To their society the disciples were going to seem like fools, whingers, crackpots and inciters of antisocial behaviour – appearances were definitely not going to be kept up. The very fabric of society would be threatened, and, as a result, they would suffer the same verbal and physical persecution that Jesus did.

Jesus’ message to the disciples is that appearances are of the least concern when the integrity of the soul is at stake. Simple! But although Jesus’ words are straightforward – retain your respectability and lose your soul – his call not to be afraid shows that he knew that this was not a simple or easy thing to do. The story about the sparrows is surely one of the tenderest in the Gospels, and one that assures the disciples of their worth in a community that would regard them as worthless. Jesus’ careful words show that he knew and understood how much the disciples had invested in their society, and how painful it would be to change it. It was their community after all. They may have been poor and lower class, but they were still part of it all. How can it not be painful to challenge that?

Sometimes it seems that we can’t win. We do our best to be decent, upright and adhere to the rules of society, and we find ourselves having to face the challenge that all we are doing is keeping up appearances. We try reinterpreting the Gospel to apply it to our life and time and we risk watering the message down; if we take it at face value it seems impossibly disruptive, and to oppose all that we do as we try to be ordinary, decent people. Well, sadly, there are no easy answers to this, and our challenge as Christian communities, filled with God’s Spirit, is to work it out for ourselves. If there is an answer it comes from the uncomfortable place between being a good person and keeping up appearances – from a dialogue between the Pharisee and the radical that is in us all, and from honest conversation with one another about our aspirations and fears. Jesus knew how painful it was to challenge the values of the community in which you’ve invested time, effort and love. He knew how much pressure there was on every decent person to keep up appearances. Let us pray for the courage to examine our own hearts honestly and to listen to our radical Lord. The pressure to keep up appearances is strong, but the loving tenderness of our saviour is stronger.