

Sunday 23 August 2020 Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT O God, you declare your almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace, that we, running the way of your commandments, may receive your gracious promises, and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING **Isaiah 51:1-6.** Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

PSALM 138 **R O Lord, your love endures for ever;** [do not abandon the works of your hands]. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing your praise. I will bow down towards your holy temple and praise your name, because of your love and faithfulness; For you have glorified your name and your word above all things. **R** When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me. All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, when they have heard the words of your mouth. They will sing of the ways of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord. Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; he perceives the haughty from afar. **R** Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand shall save me. The Lord will make good his purpose for me; O Lord, your love endures for ever; do not abandon the works of your hands. **R**

SECOND READING **Romans 12:1-8.** I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

GOSPEL **Matthew 16:13-20.** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

POST COMMUNION Lord of all mercy, we your faithful people have celebrated that one true sacrifice which takes away our sins and brings pardon and peace: by our communion keep us firm on the foundation of the gospel and preserve us from all sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday Homily 23 AUGUST 2020 11th SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'" Matthew 16:16

What's in a name? Each culture has its own tradition when conferring names and there can be a mixture of tribal, family and individual meanings attached. As time goes by some of these meanings can be lost. For example, the surname "Carpenter" tells us something of a family's trade in the past, but it is by pure chance if a "Carpenter" is a carpenter today. In some Christian traditions, first names are taken from those of saints or scripture. Now a baptismal name is as likely to reflect family links, or book or film characters.

We may have strong feelings for or against our own name, but it carries power for us. An "icebreaker" activity sometimes used in the first session of a group can be to ask each person present to state their name and something about it. As well as being a useful tool to fit faces and names together, the layers of history, meaning and feelings revealed can be fascinating.

Names are always significant in the Bible. They tell us much about the role the person is asked to play in the unfolding plan of salvation. Remember the importance given to the naming of Jesus and of John the Baptist in Luke's Gospel. One of the pivotal moments in the Old Testament is when Moses asks God for his name and God appears to evade the question. To know someone's name is to have power over them and no one can have that power over God.

In the Jewish tradition even God's elusive reply to Moses, often translated as "I am who I am", is never spoken aloud. Yet in today's Gospel passage Jesus asks his disciples about his own identity. To begin with he is circumspect. He asks who the crowd thinks him to be, employing the title used in Matthew's Gospel, the Son of Man. The replies are those from the past, important characters who heralded momentous shifts in the history of salvation.

But Jesus then asks his disciples who they think he is, much more direct and resonant of God's elusive self-disclosure to Moses. "But who do you say that I am?" And it is Simon Peter who answers accurately. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus is recognised and named for who he is. It is a turning point in his mission and provides for a crucial change in our understanding of the nature of God. God is no longer keeping himself apart, jealously guarding his own identity, but revealing himself as one like ourselves, even subject to human power.

The immediate sequel to today's story is the proclamation by Jesus of his journey towards suffering and death. For his faith, Peter is especially blessed by Jesus and is given a new name. He is to become the rock, the source of strength and authority for the new community, the Church, the followers of this newly revealed Christ.

Whatever our role in life, whatever our position in the Church, our starting point is the same as that of Peter and the disciples. We have to answer the same question Jesus put to them: who do we say Jesus is? Can we answer? Not just with the mind, but with the heart? We need to be ever aware of God constantly revealing himself and emptying himself for us in and through his Son. If we have the faith to do that, then we in turn receive our names. We are allowed to turn the question round and ask Jesus what name he gives us. Who does he say we are? We are all his followers but, as St Paul points out, the good of the Church and the growth of the kingdom require that we have a clear idea of what our individual contribution may be.

It is not only the clergy who are called and named in this way. Every single one of us is called by God. It is through daily prayer and reflection and the help of those who know us well that we can discern how we are to live out that calling in our everyday lives. We all have a unique contribution to make and each of our names is known to God, so it is up to us to live out that name to its fullest in the service of the kingdom.