

## **Holy Trinity Kew**

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2023

Ordinary Sunday 22

### ***Take up your Cross***

My old friend the late Bishop Robert Beal told a story about his move to Wangaratta. The Bishop was a collector of some seriously exotic things – not least among them “chiming clocks”. The removalists were chosen because they would carefully handle his precious furniture. One piece was a very large crucifix – a cross with the tortured body of Jesus on it, it was a centrepiece for the garden. As the removalist carried the crucifix from truck into Bishop’s lodge he said:

“Hey Bishop, where do you want me to put your mate?”

He meant no disrespect, and I know the Bishop was delighted to be referred to as Jesus’ mate.

Today’s Gospel occurs in the region of Caesarea Philippi (in the very north of Israel). Today the area is called ‘Banias’. It was at this lovely place that many people came to hear all manner of guru’s and spiritual leaders speak about faith and doctrine. You might imagine little groups gathered where water emerges from under a rock and hill. There are statues in the niches of the rock – images of gods.

Jesus uses this conglomerate of voices, messages and images – to ask, as we heard last Sunday:

“Who do people say that I am?”

It was Peter who replies

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus responds:

“Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven”

He goes on to say:

“You are Peter and on this rock, I will build my Church etc.”

Perhaps a play on the rock in the background with statues and images of many other gods.

So just a few verses on and Jesus shares with his friends what the future is going to hold for himself. Great suffering and death. They didn't seem to hear – on the third day resurrection.

Peter showing instant leadership, potential and trying his hand at pastoral care of his master – takes Jesus aside and says:

“This must not happen.”

He is attempting to transform a tricky moment. We all know the scenario at work, or in our clubs, even Parish Council or our relationships.

“Let's not jump to conclusions or even over dramatize – cool heads might prevail – our worst fears might not happen.”

Jesus, would have none of that, Peter was in fact missing a basic principle of being a disciple and its picked up in today's Collect – we pray:

O God

Whose Son has shown the way of the cross

To be the way of life:

Transform and renew our minds

That we may not be conformed to this world

But may offer ourselves wholly to you as a living sacrifice

Through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God, now and for ever. Amen

This is a huge challenge for disciples of Jesus in every age – we suffer from what my old friend the late Fr Bob Maguire used to call “affluenza”. We have so much of everything – we find it impossible to consider giving up anything and so are like the proverbial camel looking at how we may be loaded up as we pass through the eye of a needle!

Jesus says to Peter (and the others) you are not setting your mind on divine things but on human things. We come to Church, Sunday by

Sunday, I hope, to get closer to God – to be holier – but apart from leaving this place – how can we move or be transformed?

Jesus continues:

“If you want to be a follower – take up your cross and follow me.”

The common form of public execution was crucifixion – it was not nice, in fact it was cruel. Jesus was perhaps looking ahead prophetically to his own death – but more than that, he was saying that the way to holiness, to be closer to God, is the way of sacrifice.

When St Luke quotes Jesus he adds the word ‘daily’ – this is helpful –

“Take up your cross daily and follow me.”

It is therefore, a lifestyle we adopt as followers of Jesus that builds on selflessness.

Paul in today’s second reading is reflecting on this same subject:

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

he says.

That final passage could be a poster writ large in every Christian house.

“Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to that which is good, love one another with mutual affection outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”

I think the frightening aspect of Jesus’ talk with Peter was the fact that the cross equalled death. But Jesus was speaking, perhaps metaphorically, it might mean physical death but he was really saying we are to die to the old self – only then can we, like St Paul says, really aim to love unconditionally, as God loves us.

As a one-time Jewish leader, St Paul, knew what the cross meant. Writing to the Corinthian Church he says:

“For Jews demand signs and Greeks divine wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to

Gentiles. But for those who are being called, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

The cross is there central to everything we do, think and say.

Long ago I used to buy Church supplies at the Catholic Emporium in Elizabeth Street. It was run by a very Catholic lady – Miss Burke. One day, while I was in the shop, two ladies came in to buy a present for a sick friend – they chose a cross and chain – need to be blessed – priest – saw me wearing my clerical colour and asked me. Miss Burke looked a bit shocked.

“I am an Anglican Priest”

“We are Salvation Army and Presbyterian and our friend is Uniting Church.”

(Miss Burke relieved.)

The cross worn around our neck or on top of our Church building or wherever it is, is our special sign and our constant reminder to follow Jesus – to live sacrificially and to be selfless.

In 2,000 years, I don’t believe the Church has produced a finer disciple than St Francis of Assisi – yet the little man had to understand the transition from “affluenza” to “new life” before he could achieve the many things we now honour. Yet he did not die a martyr – but he died an old man in his own bed having lived a wonderful life of selfless love and service following Jesus – even apparently receiving the stigmata “the wound of Jesus”.

As disciples. we are called to lose our life by taking up the cross daily and then we will find life. Most especially following Jesus who desires to be our ‘mate’.