



The Order of St James (UK) Newsletter

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FOR ALL THE SAINTS

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ (Wales)

"Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect", is written for our inspiration but worries some Christians as they know it isn't going to happen - certainly not in their lifetime. Our 'magnifico exemplum inspiratori' of the saints in history, and in stained glass windows shows much suffering being inflicted upon the martyrs of the church but they all appear serene, patient, accepting and not a word of 'ouch' between them all.

So how accurate are our inspirational images of the saints of old, heading earnestly for the reward in heaven assured them by their Lord and Master?

Surely God doesn't expect us to be perfect! How can we be? We were born in sin and conceived from sinful - however nice - human stock. Is it possible to achieve perfection - in any shape or form - or at least to try?

Gerald Priestland, the journalist remarked, on saints,

'I am a great believer in the saints, and the saints of all times and in all traditions are not dogmatic – their life is their message. Sanctity and humility cut across denominational boundaries – and this should not surprise us, for it is the same Holy Spirit who is responsible.

On the other hand, saints become saints not because 'God loves them and attends to them more than he does to us; but because they love and attend to him more than we do.'

Points for a sermon on Saints must contain: perfection of saints on earth and in heaven, people on earth from whom grace shines out good works, brave deeds, kind words, wise counsel and harmonious lives tribute to any local hero the congregation will easily recognize as 'doing good'

But beware plaster saints - they crack easily. Some cracks - like an old vase steeped in history and usage over hears or centuries may not show at a distance but close-up mar the product - and also de-value it in terms of its antique value [collectors' value]

Verse 3 of 'I sing a song of the saints of God...' reads:

They lived not only in ages past;
there are hundreds of thousands still;
the world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Christ's will.

You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,
in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
for the saints of God are just folk like me,
and I mean to be one too.

A 'Devil's advocate' in the Roman Catholic church is set up to seek cracks and to counter-argue goodness of a person being elevated to sainthood. But the human failings have to far outweigh the Divine spirituality and evidence of miracles achieved through pleading to the saint must be clear and proven.

Yet saints are remembered by the Church...and rightly so. Their example is an inspiration to us and light held ahead of our earthly journey. They intercede for us, some believe, before God's throne. They are our human-ness brought to His sanctity...our weakness made strong by His power and eternity.

Our purpose here is not just to 'go out and breathe', as I heard an American daughter say to her wealthy and retired father: "You don't have anything to do but go out and breathe!" Our purpose, as commanded, is to Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit [and lo I am with you even to the end of the age]

If we fail to do this work for Him, while it is day - and before the night comes - we are failing in our mission - and in His.

Forgive us Lord...

...the flaws of our faith

the marks of our failure

the chips in our character

the cracks in our commitment

the breaks in our promises

Restore us and remake us

so our value to you in our world is the best we can be,

as perfect as God will allow us to be

for your mercy and your truth's sake AMEN.

Read: Romans 12, 9-21, pause for thought and then read Matthew 16, 21-28

Peter is quite famous for his Denials. When I read, as I now have much time to do, stories of martyrdom and persecution both in the Early Church, the Middle Ages and now, I wonder what I would be like under torture. I think I would blab fairly quickly to avoid pain for I am a coward when it comes to being uncomfortable - covid jabs aside - and a very bad patient if it comes to being ill. The staunch faith of the martyrs moves me.

Those strong Christians who are held up as examples to us in Christian literature, or depicted on stained glass windows, seemed to invite imprisonment, torture and death as a just reward for a Christ-centred life, to welcome the promise of heaven – and that soon – and to greet death as a friend, rather than a feared enemy.

John Moschos, wrote around 600AD of the stoicism – as well as the weirdness – of monks and ascetics he encountered as he toured the entire Christian world of the East, praying and learning and receiving blessing as he travelled. In the translated version of his book *Pratum Spirituale* – *The Spiritual Meadow*, with which I started a 25 book retreat holiday some years back in the USA, aided in addition by the Rule of St Benedict, I watched as he took “each martyr sacrifice as a plucked flower from a meadow – red roses for martyrs of royal persecution or war, violet for sacrifice of imperial whim, white lilies for the death of the innocent”, etc. He tells us he has “plucked the finest flowers of the unmown meadow and worked them into a crown of life, which,” he says, “I now offer to you, most faithful child, and through you to the world at large.”

William Dalrymple, a journalist of our own age then retraces the route of Moschos’s journey in his riveting book: *From the Holy Mountain*, as, armed with the hidden strength of the saints and the humble witness of ordinary Christians, he observes, with wise sadness, a declining ritualistic church and a lack of spiritual substance and stamina; a succumbing to the strength of newly dominant religious pressures and new persecutions which he supposes we will all have to encounter in due course.

Are we, he asks, strong enough to face such a challenge?

Except in a few cases where absolute courage is making today's notable and press-impressing martyrs and shocking, or shaming us, he finds too many of us relaxing and being lulled into a dangerous complacency that life here will go on for us as Christians forever in a tame, leisurely, kindly committed, unchallenging way.

Nina Shea writes in her somewhat shocking book *In the Lion's Den* of today's persecution:

'Persecution is proven and even boasted about by: Sudan, Cuba, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, China, Pakistan, North Korea, Egypt, Laos, Vietnam and much of the Soviet Union. The growth of house-churches, Protestant Evangelical groups, and the second largest growing Christian faith – Baha'i – is perceived as a threat to Orthodoxy on the one hand and Islam on the other'.

Islam, she says, seeks to 'capture the soul of a historically tolerant Faith'. The demonisation of and xenophobia towards Christians can, if taken to charismatic extreme, serve to intimidate Muslims seeking freedom from repressive regimes. In China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam remnant Communist regimes feel threatened by Christians whose allegiance and authority transcends worldly government. They too intimidate non-Christian dissenters.

The survival of churches undermines political aims where tyranny reigns because they seek to preserve human dignity and freedom of the individual to think, pray, practice love and draw closer to God.

Hatred of the West - especially most recently the USA - is frequently used to suppress Christianity which is still perceived as a Western[ised] practised and 'endowed' faith regime.

So our Bible passages are particularly noteworthy in trying to strengthen us not to fail in the task allotted by God to us. Not to falter, not to betray, not to deny, not to give any ground to tyranny, persecution, obsession, weakening an already weakened church.

Peter, in our Gospel, is horrified by the suffering Christ refers to for himself if he goes up to Jerusalem, as he must.

Whether Peter's instant hot denial stops to think of the implications is unclear. Had he stopped to think, what must happen to Christ must also happen to him, as of course it was later to happen. So the impetuous 'Big Fisherman' takes the Lord aside and says, "No Lord, this shall never happen to you."

Do we in any way try to stop what God has planned because it doesn't fit in with our comfortable, convenient, cosmetic view of Christian practise and life? Because it's not nice, not in our own plan of life, or damages what we feel we have worked for, for God?

I have always felt Our Lord's reply to Peter was a bit unkind, a bit 'over the top'.

"Get behind me, Satan, you are not supporting in your mind the things God has ordained, but what man wants to happen."

Then, to us all, He says:

Indulging yourself is not a Christian path

Saving your life will surely lose it

Gaining the world at the risk of losing your soul is pointless

You will be rewarded or punished for what you have done or failed to do.

"Some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" did not, of course, refer to living for ever, which some of the disciples misunderstood, but not required to go through the horrid death – many long drawn out - of torture, persecution, Roman public death in an arena or martyrdom by any other means.

So should we just take a last bit of Old Millennium litmus test to our Christian life to see how we match up to the Saints.

A spring clean, dust-down and spot-check.

Living the Christly life is fully described in our Romans reading. 12, 9-21

For your 'homework' please read it again.

I think it's much more demanding than the 10 commandments, which most of us probably keep – more or less - as part of our upbringing or nature. The following are tough. It IS an exam. But mark your own papers!

Love sincerely. No that's not just the lovable people but the social outcasts, the rejects, the 'failure people' too

Hate evil – real hate, detestation of what is wrong. No sometimes it is quite fun, admit it. Hard to really put it aside.

Cling to what is good - fairly easy by comparison

Honour others above ourselves – now be honest. Aren't you secretly the most wonderful person you really know?

Never lack zeal. What never? As the G&S captain asks. 'Well', we reply, 'hardly ever'. Not good enough I am afraid.

Have spiritual fervour. Well lots of us know about that – but try offsetting that against the honouring others above yourselves and it may flop down the batting order a bit.

Be joyful in hope, not just always hopeful and be patient in affliction. Those of you who know suffering can tell the rest of us about that one...please.

Be faithful in prayer. If I was the devil and your judge I might be able to rest my case on that one alone!

Share with those in need. Well our society helps us to do all that, but it's only partially OK if we do the others as well.

Practise hospitality. Perhaps in your church you're getting better on that one. Maybe, as the Americans say, we've still 'a ways to go'.

Bless those who persecute you. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn.

Live in harmony with one another.

Don't be proud or conceited. Don't be socially elitist. Don't repay evil for evil.

Be careful to do right in the eyes of everyone and if possible live at peace with all. Impossible? Not in Christ's world.

No revenge. Feed and refresh with drink your enemy

And finally don't be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

Now of course a lot of these ethics and commandments were anathema to the Romans, for scoring points over each other and rough, macho living was all the rage – the thing to be done, rejoicing in someone else's downfall as it gave you space to succeed or climb over someone else. So we could dismiss all of this for ourselves by saying:

- It wasn't intended for our generation
- It wasn't part of the direct teaching of Christ so it doesn't apply

- Things have changed nowadays so we must adjust the teaching to suit our way of life.

But if in any ways you and I can adjust our mode of living to take these gentler, Christ-like characteristics on board in the thought-provoking days ahead, then I suggest we seriously try to do so, for His sake, for His Name's sake, for the sake of our witness for Him in our World.

Have another look at your life, as I seek to re-consider mine, that we may grow closer to Our Master, and that others may see in our lives that we have been with Jesus, we are His, called by His Name, salt to an impure world, courage in a world where failure scores, healing to a hurt world, fairness to a defrauded world and preservation to a damaged world.

Each saint and martyr's contribution was small and many were totally insignificant in the total scenario of the establishment and growth of Christ's church. Our contribution in any of the above may be very small, we may think insignificant. But because it is commanded of us, it will be blessed, used by God for the strengthening and growth of His Kingdom.

May it be so, for His Name's sake. AMEN. Fr Ed

Covid-19 and Yorkshire, God's Own County.

Jesus hadn't seen his Father for a while and asked where he had been.

'I've been in Yorkshire for the last 18 months.'

Why?' Jesus asked.

'I've been working from home.....'

SAMUEL'S CALL and THE SILENCE OF GOD

Fr Ed Elsey

I found this poem in Kington church on the Welsh border. Maybe trite, but true.

If things go wrong, do not despair or think yourself alone

but listen, for within your heart, His love shall call you home.

Don't look for signs in worldly things in answer to a prayer,

for God has written us a book – the answers lie in there.

If things don't go as you would wish, don't seek for who is liable

But search God's book for all you need is written in The Bible.

Reminded me rather of the Monty Python slogan: 'Always look on the bright side of life'!

So, for our first lesson of instruction from His Word, go to 1 Samuel ch.3 vv 1-20

Samuel literally means: Heard by God – that will prove interesting as our thoughts proceed.

And our linked second lesson, from: 1st Epistle of John, ch 5, 1- 15

You'll recognise all too well a certain visual aid. Imagine....

<Phone rings> Who did you say it was? Lord who...?

Are you sure you've got the right number?

Oh right. But I've only got a minute.

Anyway, I've asked you not to call me at work!

Do you get as annoyed as I do by the bleep and buzz of mobile phones - tunes even, my life! - on trains and buses, at street corners, even worse to see driving concentration being impaired by hand-sets at ears?

Whenever, it seems, we want to be concentrating on something else or even napping in the train, there is the offending bleep or jingle. Personally I wouldn't mind so much if the conversations I overheard were not so puerile, self-important and seemingly pointless. They're here to stay.

I have one myself, of course, though I hate using it and to the annoyance of friends, rarely remember to switch the thing on or have it charged when it is most needed. However, could modern messaging teach us something about our faith and our listening to God?

I prefer e-mails which can be read at a time convenient to me. But God often speaks to us when we least expect it,

When God speaks to us are we prepared to drop what we are doing, listen to him, obey him; or is it yet another distraction for our highly personally-organised lives, to the exclusion of His will for us, whatever that will might be. Are we ever totally available to Him - FOR Him?

Elkanah had certainly given up all hope of any heirs of his by Peninnah going into service in the Temple. If any of them had done so it would certainly have been mentioned in 1 Samuel chapter 1. It isn't. And as for Hannah. Poor old Hannah. They all teased poor old Hannah for the disgrace and Divine shame which in those days they associated with the inability to produce a child. And of course in those days it was always the woman's fault. I wonder how much we have moved on! And yet with all her disappointment and feeling of rejection by the others, she remained faithful, first to her husband by accompanying him - and second to her God by accompanying Elkanah to his regular Temple worship. Such faithfulness!

As we know from the familiar story, that faithfulness was rewarded in three ways: first by the birth of a child, in those days it being a son would have been the second importance, and the third in his being selected by God for the special purpose of ordering and disciplining the Kingdom of Israel through the troubled birth of God's Chosen people as a Nation set aside for God's special purpose in History.

We cannot choose when or how incoming calls come – we can choose whether or not we answer them - and often it is at a most inconvenient time for us. It was for Samuel. Even more awkward for the ancient Eli whose shame over his recalcitrant sons' immoral behaviour was a Temple joke...a Sabbath tut-tut! Now to be taught a lesson by the candle boy! My life! Not easy to be taught a spiritual lesson by someone you regard as your inferior!

For homework – as a former teacher I always set homework for my congregations - you might like to compare the last verses of ch.2 with the story of Joseph and his brothers in ch 42-45 of Genesis. Younger brother given vision by God. Not a dissimilar example given by a just and Mighty God. And if like me you now have more time for homework, compare Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2 with Mary's Magnificat prayer in Luke 1. Interesting similarities again. Totally available for God!

Back to Samuel and his call. Eventually the old Eli sends him back to his draughty corridor corner close to the terrifying Ark of the Covenant, to reply: Speak Lord for your servant is listening. Teenagers get scared too, you know, whatever impression they may like to give you. I watched some recently as they watched a Harry Potter movie – again in Lord of the Rings. Scary stuff. How spooky could the Temple get?

I suppose for me the fact of Samuel's readiness to be called is the most stimulating thought.

Too often we tend to be the one who is making demands on God, not the other way around.

Too often we tend to make it:

Listen Lord, for your servant is speaking

rather than:

Speak Lord for your servant is listening.

So I have labelled this sermon: The Silence of God

Have you ever been in such dire need and cried out to God in distress and the heavens seem, as Elijah found, as brass – no response from the Almighty – no sign, no sound, no voice!

Why doesn't God speak when we want to hear?

Could it be too often for the same reason we don't want to listen when He wants us to?

If only the two of us could be in harmony when such a conversation happens!! Yet this book, the Bible, which we neglect at our peril, has countless examples of people trying to 'get together with God'. Sometimes it happens. Sometimes it doesn't. The silence of God is often ominous: yet the noise of man is powerful – often over-powering! Certainly distracting!

Our readings demonstrate how men and women seek answers from God, yet often hear nothing in response to their prayers. If God appears silent to us, I wonder if it is because He wants us to work things out for ourselves, with the guidance He has already given us.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta wrote of her frustration at the silence of God and in papers released in the course of attempting to attain sainthood for the deceased nun and Indian social worker, she admits to occasionally being tempted to think God was not there at all. This shocked some Roman Catholics.

Many Christians have known this silence of God. How does God speak and what do we expect to hear God say? The ancients feared seeing or hearing God as it would surely end with their destruction. Moses hid his face when God passed by! Some modern charismatic Christians talk to God as though he were a 'buddy' at work. Some who believe they will one day see Him face to face and be judged for their lives and living, might wish that day a long way away!

In our New Testament lesson, the epistle of John reminds us that we can test what we hear, to know if it is really 'of God' or 'of men'. I have spent considerable time in the USA and have heard some of the ranting, self-appointed, flashy evangelistic preachers, live and on tv, and have often been sceptical whether the message they give, whilst sounding authentic, is really the Word of God in season for the people they are addressing and who are giving more generously than we could contemplate for an exotic preacher lifestyle...or whether it is teaching adapted to their own physical ends.

I apologise to my may US friends if that last sentence offends. Not intended. Just historical fact. But we can test what we hear. In many instances the Bible repeats, as in the gospels, versions of the same teaching, so we know it was commonly known and used by the early Church.

Intelligent Muslims are currently doing that form of testing by re-reading their Koran. Respect all who explore their faith, question, test, argue, debate and attest. Many are finding their traditional family-held faith wanting and are looking for something better; often under considerable persecution. Many find Christianity a truer and more satisfying way. The Faith for Muslims Movement, keeps me well-informed of this. We as Christians need to keep constantly 'closer' to the path Christ has taught us and led us. Not to be found 'wanting' by those who seek to see Christ in us. To know him more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly, day by day, as St Richard of Chichester put it. And listening is all part of that closeness.

After all, why should God say anything? We can still hear from the written word, know and be assured of what we need to believe.

I am a member of the British Orthodox Society. Orthodox Christians believe that the constant repetition of the liturgy and traditional prayers is important personal discipline – to be practised daily, morning and night, so that somewhere, throughout the world, at any moment in time, God is being praised and adored and sought by someone. I like that idea. So I do it myself.

Other churches feel the need to throw out the old and replace it with a more trendy alternative. This I do not!

The late, but great, Selwyn Hughes, whose stimulating Bible Reading notes some of you may know, says: 'Always remember, whenever God's finger points the way to anything His hand always provides the power. It is ours to be willing: His to be supporting.'

The first rule of loving God is - obedience. Then in the silence, comes the power. Archbishop William Temple said, 'Every revelation of God is a demand and the way to knowledge of God is obedience.' 'When we stop obeying, God stops revealing.'

Several fellow clergy and I have been practicing 'centre-ing' prayer. I discovered it in one of my annual retreats in a Holy House on the Isle of Wight. Used by The Desert Fathers of old and by many saints and ordinary Christians since, it is proving of great comfort and strength to many. One takes, in the silence of meditation, and without any distraction of any other kind, just one single word, thought or idea from Scripture or Christian experience, and lets the mind roll it around like a marble in a race for twenty minutes or so, forming it gradually into a closing prayer. For example words like: suffering, or healing, or patience, or accusation, or time. It takes mental discipline but practise makes it more effective daily. The idea is that too many words can confuse: the mind works faster and more effectively than the tongue!

Notice too from the story of Samuel that it was the young servant of the temple, not the trained priest who was called to be significant for his nation at the time of its need. Many are called, but few are chosen. Samuel was to be the selector of Kings, the corrector of rulers, the protector of faith in such testing times. And all because he learned to listen.

Many commentators have linked this story with a call to priesthood. Many an altar boy through the regular faithful observance and familiarity of the Mass came to feel a call to Catholic priesthood. But for us, it is a priesthood of all believers:

1 Peter 2,9 reminds us all that: “you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have!”

Oh go on – we’ve got time – let’s finish the passage: Live such good lives among unbelievers that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day He visits us.”

Back to our mobile phone. “Don’t call me at work!” But that is where most of us should expect to be called to witness, to share Christ with those who haven’t heard or who have ignored his daily bleep. And to persuade others of the value of worship and deeper study. And to do that, we need our ‘daily bleep’ with God, an instant prayer, however brief, longer for those with longer to spare, remembering those for whom we care, those in special need, those who may have lost the love for Him they once had. God spoke to Paul dramatically and swiftly, turning him from what John Stott described as ‘from ‘heresy’ to ‘hearsay’.’

God often speaks to us in times of crisis, maybe not national but personal crisis, when we can, like Paul, see no clear way forward. He does not set out to destroy our plans or our confidence, but He wants to channel us into new directions, new dimensions, depths for His service - for His people.

That, of course, is one of the reasons why we benefit from each others’ meditations, thoughts, experience and wisdom – to learn and appreciate more - and why many of our children across the nation will have been trained in special youth departments in The Way of Christ on this day, though probably in different styles than our own Sunday school experiences!

Never forget to pray for Christian children, especially teenagers: for them the trials and tribulations of their faith may just be beginning in a confusing and disturbing world.

So many examples of distressed youngsters have emerged throughout the recent Covid lockdown situation, its worrying anxieties, its physical and mental stresses and the lack of experience so many have suffered in trying to cope and survive it all.

As God called the boy Samuel, so Christ, as God, calls us. How shall we reply or respond?

Our faith is constantly under test, and should be, even though in this country that rarely becomes a painful test...usually if we're witnessing properly, just a teeny bit embarrassing at the worst.

For some who witness worldwide it is very much harder.

All the more reason why we should pray earnestly, daily, for our missionary links and correspondents who face daily ridicule and maybe punishment or physical persecution for their faith. Never forget the power of daily prayer!

In that connection let us remain constantly in prayer for our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Eastern Europe and Russia, at this time of great waiting and human uncertainty. China, Korea, Africa too: those persecuted by alien regimes and faiths contrary to our own.

So for us today, and maybe a fun thing to do every time you hear someone else's wretched mobile phone bleep, you can silently, like the praying Hannah and Samuel:

say, [instead of: Listen Lord, for your servant is speaking]

pray: Speak Lord for your servant is listening.

or as the poem of Frances Ridley Havergal put it:

Master, speak, Thy servant heareth, waiting for thy gracious word,

Longing for Thy voice that cheereth; Master let it now be heard.

I am listening Lord, to thee – what hast thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master, let me know it is to me;

Speak, that I may follow faster, with a step more firm and free.

Master speak, and make me ready when Thy voice is truly heard.

With obedience glad and steady, still to follow every word;

I am listening Lord, to thee, what hast Thou to say to me?

And earnestly seek His answer. He will answer you. In His good time – not yours or mine.

Or the answer will come from your humble and obedient heart and from your increasing knowledge and love of His Word.

Listen... obey... do.

May we all know the strength of God in our later years and the confidence and peace that comes through persistent faith and prayer... thanking God daily for all the blessings of our lives so far; seeing his presence and power in all we have been privileged to do on this earth, and trusting His eternal providence for our future.

May it be so, for His Name's sake. AMEN.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ June 2021

THE CHURCH'S CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

1 Kings 8, 22-30 & John 13, 21-38

Third Sunday after Pentecost [Trinity 2] 13 June 2021

Think THE TEMPLE. After all the process of building and decorating and furnishing this great edifice, Solomon, in all his glory comes to His Temple to dedicate it to the God who guided him with wisdom and wealth to produce it.

His prayer, however, is not the grand celebratory language we might expect. It is a prayer of great humility, acknowledging God's goodness, in context of the Covenant with the Chosen People. Then comes a recounting of the deeds of defence of His people in Battle.

"Hear from Heaven, your dwelling place – and forgive. Deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart - for you alone know the hearts of all men."

Gordon Thomas in his fascinating book: The Trial [tough reading, but illuminating and once again my Holy Week study this year] explains - ironically – that at the same point of entry to Herod's [rebuilt] Temple, where Jews upon entering invoked the prayer: YAHWEH THOU SHOULD EVER BE WATCHING, the 'escort of Christ' would have halted and Caiaphas would have gone alone into the Temple as this prayer was invoked again: 'Yahweh, thou should ever be watching' The Galilean preacher had provoked the Temple and its leaders - either the true Messiah or a phoney - an imposter - and Caiaphas had the task of deciding which He was.

Beyond the scene of ritual butchery stood the actual Temple, reached by Twelve steps, each one representing a tribe of Israel. The colonnade which embraced the main building was a full 98 feet high and 147 feet wide. Rising above this were the unbroken walls of the building and its roof which was covered with gold.

At this point the 'escort' bearing Christ to final trial would have halted, allowing Caiaphas to continue alone into the Temple within which Jews everywhere evoked Solomon's prayer:

"Yahweh, thou should ever be watching, night and day, over this place of Thine, the chosen sanctuary of Thy Name. Be this the meeting-place where Thou wilt listen to Thy servant's prayer. Whatever requests I or Thy people make shall find audience here; Thou wilt listen from Thy dwelling-place in Heaven, and listening will forgive."

The Dedication: After many years of planning and work, the great and wonderful Temple had been finished.

Solomon called the people together and in a solemn service brought the Ark of the Covenant – the sacred box that had accompanied the Israelites throughout their wanderings in the desert – to its new resting-place, and poured forth a long and elaborate prayer, praising God and King David [and himself a little bit] and devoting the Temple to God's service forever.

We too have dedication services when a new church or cathedral is given to the service and work of Almighty God and its priests committed before the people.

The building will have involved many people: the donor, the founder, the architects, the planners, designers, skilled craftsmen for the intricate work of sculpture or decoration, carpenters and masons for the main construction. If you have ever seen the uni-dimensional plans of a new building – or as I saw recently a 3-dimensional architect's computer construction – you will be amazed that something so intricate could ever be constructed: when I watched sculptors working at Wells Cathedral I never ceased to be amazed at the skill with which the bits which are not part of the design are chipped away from a block of clean stone to leave the design bit intact. I recalled the stone which the builders rejected.

In early times there would have been masses of slaves or serfs who did the heavy work of lifting, fetching and carrying. In the case of magnificent Charters Cathedral in France, it is recorded that the whole population harnessed themselves like oxen, dragging great stones and timbers to the new church site.

Today much would be mechanised – not then. Nor should we omit to mention teams of workers at quarry, forest or mine, producing materials swiftly to enable the building to proceed on schedule. The famous Abbey at Buckfast – using mediaeval skills and technique and the vast Anglican Cathedral of Liverpool using the best of mechanical technology, have been the best documented schemes of this proportion and size to be erected in our own times. [Since my father enrolled me as a Friend and Builder of Liverpool Cathedral I have watched its development throughout my life].

So the actual building reflects enormous sacrifice of personal skill, time and effort to bring about the whole. A workman chipping away at a single stone in London, when asked what he was doing, replied: I am building St Paul's Cathedral. He saw his small part as a member of the team as an integral contribution to the vast whole!

So then does the spiritual Church – or body of people which make up such an institution – depend upon committed Christians who come together with the material walls to worship God and hear His word, securing the detail even if not seeing the whole Divine plan?

Here is the contrast. The grandeur of the Temple which would establish once and for all the worship of Yahweh with true honour and splendour had become a butcher's shop where ritual slaughter sent a burning stench of cloud drifting over the whole city of Jerusalem and a trading post of souvenir paraphernalia, for which money was changed at extortionate rates, for Temple tokens to enable strangers and locals to buy.

The Real Church is the invisible, spiritual body. The visible building, beautiful and well-loved though it may be, is basically nothing more nor less than a shelter and a protection for the worshipping congregation. The building exists for the church.

Once we begin to attach more importance to the building than to the purpose - and to the pews than to the people - we are on the wrong track! Christ tells us, "My house is a house of prayer" – all other functions are peripheral.

The theme for the Third Sunday after Pentecost [Trinity 2] is THE CHURCH'S CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST.

The evidence for that confidence in this Church is surely clear. We do not need grand ceremonies to demonstrate God's love in this parish, though a Procession of Witness like our annual Patronal Festival March through the nearby streets is vitally important as a ritual demonstration of our Oneness in Christ.

So in our NT reading we are given Judas. From deep in his heart comes the essential but treacherous act of betrayal which would send His Lord to certain death. He leaves the table to the astonished glances of his fellow disciples as though he was going to perform a pre-arranged duty for his Master – which in a way, of course, he was. His problem is one which has intrigued and mystified people down the ages. Writers constructed books, plays, stories to explain, as they see it, why Judas behaved as he did. The Orthodox church celebrates Judas as a saint – fulfilling a Divine, if rotten, job – but his shrine is always just outside the front door of the Church – I saw one elaborately decorated outside the Russian Orthodox Church in Seville.

Jesus had chosen Judas as one of his closest and most intimate friends. Jesus must therefore have loved and trusted him; equally Judas seems to have been a man of high quality and influence, deeply drawn by the magnetism of Our Lord. Too much undervalued in the jigsaw of the Redemption story and demonised in stories.

Was money his persuasion and, as John suggests, was he avaricious, as when he objected to the waste of the valuable ointment which Mary poured over the feet of Jesus in the house at Bethany – or stole from the group purse, as John accuses?

Or was this hindsight vindictiveness by later writers, to discredit the betrayer?

The motive would seem too small for so vast a crime: mere greed would not account for the terrible remorse which came over him, leading him to destroy his own life. Thirty pieces of silver was a very small amount, even for him.

A deeper motive is suggested by his surname [or nickname] 'Iscariot'. He allegedly was, or had been, a supporter of the underground hit-men: the Sicarii or 'dagger men', an extremist Jewish rebel group comparable to the Hizbollah, specialising in assassinations. Here in Jesus was a man to rally rebel causes, lead to revolution against the Romans and free the land for ever for the people. Realising Christ's path of love and not violence may have sparked a bitterness in Judas which was to know no bounds. Instead of submitting to trial, torture and inevitable death, surely Christ would call down the legions of angels at his Heavenly command to avoid such a fate.

So we see Judas, for whatever reason, disillusioned, confused but still essential to the story of redemption as the agent by whom the supreme act of love was to come about. And the final rejection in the reply of the High Priest's representative: 'What is that to us: see to it yourself.'

The love we show must be without secondary agenda, without resentment, without revenge, without backhand and without betrayal.

Thomas a Kempis said: Love is eager, sincere, and kind: it is glad and lovely; it is strong, patient and faithful, wise, long-suffering and resolute and it never seeks its own ends, for where a man seeks his own ends, he at once falls out of love.

We must be constantly on our guard to ensure that our love is, as Maximilian Kolbe [the Auschwitz Saint] prayed... "without limits – pray that my love may be without limits"

Our Church, like our faith, must have no walls, no sacrifices of a butchery kind, no money to be exchanged before coming in, no admission charge [not a view shared by all our cathedrals it seems] no official cleansing or priestly approval – just an undying love for our Lord and Master, a love which does not fail us at the moment of commitment as it failed poor Judas – a love which does not betray the love shown by our Saviour to us.

We had a Vision of our Millennium several years before its arrival - do you remember all the hype and myth of what and how it would be?

Now we have reached 2021, how much has been activated, proven and realised?

Can we boast a love and a confidence which declares itself in personal sacrifice and service to all our neighbours in Christ, so that men and women may be drawn to Him and know that love for themselves?

Both Solomon and Judas were seemingly placed in the precise position where God needed them...in their own time frame, their own place in history. What about us? Are we where we are most needed, for a specific purpose...in ours?

We have the opportunity to serve him to His greater glory so we need to seek His will and function in our lives. In our prayer and in our search let us seek that will and purpose and when we have found it, do it with all our might for Him.

May we recognise the task given us and the challenge and seek to fulfil it, with confidence, in His power, for His sake. AMEN

The Order of St James Monthly Service June 2021

Opening words

(Jesus said,) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19.

Hymn (to be said or sung)

1 Bright the vision that delighted

once the sight of Judah's seer;

sweet the countless tongues united

to entrance the prophet's ear.

2 Round the Lord in glory seated

cherubim and seraphim

filled his temple, and repeated

each to each the alternate hymn:

3 'Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;

earth is with its fullness stored;

unto thee be glory given,

holy, holy, holy, Lord.'

4 Heaven is still with glory ringing,

earth takes up the angels' cry,

'Holy, holy, holy,' singing,

'Lord of hosts, the Lord most high.'

5 With his seraph train before him,	6 'Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;
with his holy church below,	earth is with its fullness stored;
thus unite we to adore him,	unto thee be glory given,
bid we thus our anthem flow:	holy, holy, holy, Lord.' Amen

God's Protection and Strength.

Psalm 46.

God is our refuge and strength. He is always with us, a tested and well proved help in time of trouble . Lord, help us not to fear. Even when we are faced with the prospect of the most terrible things.

Even if this world was destroyed, and the mountains crumbled into the sea, we would still be safe with you.

Even if there is chaos: fighting and destruction, values and beliefs denied, immorality, lawlessness and crime rampant, even then, we are safe with God.

Faced with disease, disappointment, disaster or death, nothing in life nor death, can separate us from your love for us, in Jesus Christ.

In sickness and in health, when things are going well, and when things are not going well, help us to place our trust in you.

When what we hoped for happens - and when it doesn't happen - help us to place our trust in your wisdom, and your love.

We thank you that you send us your Word and that it is not useless. Help us to hear, to perceive, to recognise and receive your Word. Above the uproar of human rebellion and the noisy clash of kingdoms and powers, help us to receive your Word.

Help us to experience your Word, in creation, in the Scriptures, in Jesus Christ, in the fellowship of your people, guided by your Spirit.

The Lord Almighty is with us, He makes wars to cease. He is our fortress, our refuge, our protection and our strength.

Lord, help us to be still, to rest our souls in you. We exalt you. We lift up your Name, Father, † Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

With Him In Spirit.

‘We know that he lives in us by the Spirit that he has put within us’ 1 John 3:24.

Ponder Upon.....

If only we could share the experience of the disciples, following Jesus through the streets of Galilee and the hills of Palestine during the course of his earthly ministry, and meeting him again as the risen Lord in the days after his resurrection. Have you ever thought that?

Do you even feel sometimes that, compared to them, we're at a disadvantage, denied the privilege of seeing him face to face, hearing his words and witnessing his deeds?

That's absolutely true, so far as it goes.... only it doesn't go far enough.

True, Jesus is not physically here beside us, but he is with us nonetheless in a way more special still: present through his Holy Spirit deep within. Tragically, that gift of the Spirit has been the subject of untold controversy within the Church, too often causing suspicion, hostility, bitterness and division - the very opposite of what God intended. Why has this happened? Because undue emphasis has been placed on the gifts rather than gift of the Spirit.

The result has been to portray the Holy Spirit as the preserve of a few Christians rather than the experience of all, yet that's not what Jesus taught. 'I will ask the Father,' he told his disciples, 'and he will give you another comforter to be with you for ever' (John 14:16).

The promise is for us all: when we acknowledge Christ as Lord and commit ourselves to his way, his Spirit is with us, making his presence real within. True, we don't get to walk and talk with Jesus quite as his followers did during his earthly ministry, but we can know him nonetheless, not only by our side but also in our heart. Could we really want more?

Ask Yourself.

In what way do you experience the Holy Spirit's presence? How would you describe the Spirit? Do you tend to see it as an impersonal force rather than as one who makes God's presence in Christ real within us?

Pray.

Spirit of God, thank you that though you are mysterious and indefinable, moving in ways beyond my predicting or control, you are also real and personal, one whose loving presence I can experience every moment of every day.

Thank you for the guidance, instruction and insight you give; for the way you challenge and inspire, nurturing and nourishing my faith and equipping me for service.

Thank you, above all, for the way you make Christ real within me so that I can know him for myself and experience the reality of God's love within my heart.

Move within me afresh and open my life to the ways you seek to work. Fill, renew, shape and transform me, to the glory of your name.

Remember.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another comforter to be with you for ever. I will not abandon you to your face; I will come to you. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send as an advocate in my name, will teach you everything, bringing to mind what I have said to you. (John 14:16,18, 26.)

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for touching my heart and transforming my life through your Spirit, for enabling, inspiring, teaching, guiding me - bringing faith to birth and sustaining it across the years. Open my heart to the Spirit's work, and make me wholly yours.

Amen.

For Family and Friends in Need

Matthew 7:11

Father, we know that you are concerned about us as individuals, and relationships. We are concerned about members of our family, and about friends who mean a lot to us. We share these concerns with you.

We share the name(s) and the need(s) that we know about, with you, in silence.

(Silence.)

You alone can help and heal. If you choose to work with us, to do your will, please show us what you want us to do. Please give us your strength to do it.

Into your safe hands, we commit these people now.

Thank you. In Jesus'Name. Amen

Priorities

Jesus said: 'Be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things'. (Matthew 6:33).

God, we ask your help in using our time, our talents and our money to work for your Kingdom. Help us to put first in our priorities the doing of your will. So we may discover, with joy, that you provide our needs. In Jesus'Name. Amen

New Testament Reading

John 16.5-15.

But now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

This is the word of the Lord,

Thanks be to God.

The Holy Gospel.

Matthew 10. 24-39

Glory to You O Lord

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

Jesus Teaches the Fear of God

“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Confess Christ Before Men

“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Christ Brings Division

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Amen.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You O Christ.

Address

In the Name of God, Father, † Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

I want you just for a moment to believe that yesterday Christianity was declared illegal. The government had finally passed legislation declaring the Church of England a dangerous and subversive group, banning all members from holding public office in the Civil service, schools or armed forces or from holding public meetings or disseminating their message.

This is why it is dangerous when we allow Government Ministers to ride slip shod over all of us.

There is a time when we as Christians and Members of the electorate to stand up and speak up. It becomes dangerous for us all to keep silent. Our past history since the 1900s has proven this time and time again.

Imagine the propaganda put out by spin doctors..... Christians, it was maintained, have no respect for private property and propagate an incendiary message which undermines the family, the government, and the economy. Christian priests and ministers will face prosecution and potentially imprisonment and anyone refusing to sign a document disavowing the teachings of Christianity will face heavy fines.

Now, before I go any further, in order to prevent you all running from the church in an Orson Wells 'War of the Worlds'-style panic, I should mention that none of this is true - at least not here and now. But how did that thought make you feel?

Perhaps you just thought it was I who had gone off my rocker – fair enough – but try to imagine now what it might mean for church membership to come at that kind of cost. What if the cost were higher?

What if you stood under the death penalty?

Would you hide me and my family in your cellar until the police had gone?

Would you pass furtive messages to one another about the secret Eucharist taking place on Sunday night, or would it just be too dangerous? How would all this feel if the police could burst in at any moment?

Today it's a fiction. one day it might not be. At other times in our history it has been true: St Alban, the first British martyr, was killed for sheltering a priest. In communist Russia, people were sent to Gulags for their faith. In Syria, China, Palestine and dozens of other places, Christians today are outlawed, penalised, harassed and killed because they are regarded as undesirables, troublemakers, or dangerous enemies of the state.

And the truth of the matter is that Christianity is dangerous if you do it properly. All of the accusations made above are true. The church falls short if it allows the faith to become safe and blandly comforting.

What would Jesus have said about the way in which we run our capitalist economy?

What would he have said about the things our politicians say about immigration, or the way we care for the most vulnerable in society?

What would he say about the way we go about sharing the material wealth he has given us?

I ask, because whatever that is, we should be saying it.

We are the body of Christ. We are his voice, his heart, his hands and feet. Nobody will speak out if we don't, and if we do, the chances are we will be hated and ridiculed for it. What is more, it has been done, is being done, by others with more to lose than us.

In the passage from Matthew's gospel that we hear today, Jesus is preparing his disciples to go out into the world carrying the good news that 'the kingdom of God has drawn near' and it is very clear that he is preparing them to face hostility and danger because of this message.

Now, bear in mind that at the time the gospel was written, most likely several decades later, Christians were facing just the kind of threat that we have been speaking about.

Christianity was a fugitive, underground religion for the first centuries of its life.

The text reads as though the author has carefully arranged various sayings of Jesus into a single monologue to give comfort and courage to those in fear for their lives: If they called me names, says Jesus, they will call you names too.

Take up your cross, says Jesus, as I took up mine.

You may feel small and helpless as a sparrow, but know that God knows you inside out, and sees everything, and is with you.

Don't be afraid of losing your life for following Christ. Be afraid of losing your souls by following something worse.

These are tough words to hear. They call for faith of such an integrity that it challenges even close family bonds. Many of those who first read these words may well have been disowned by their Jewish relatives. Later generations would have read these words as they hid in the catacombs, or as they sat in a refugee camp or a prison cell. They knew what it meant to lay down their life.

And yet they did it. Time and again; generation after generation; often against all the odds. Like a gardener fighting Japanese knotweed, the world just couldn't get rid of them. The all-surpassing love of God in Jesus Christ was too great a message to abandon, and it has found its way to us. To our ears. The task now is for us to receive unspilled into our cupped hands the Water of Life, and to carry it out into the world, and to share it with as much courage and integrity as we can manage.

So now the message is for us too. Do not be afraid. There is nothing they can do to you that they have not already done to me. I have overcome the world.

Let's keep this truth in mind. It is too easy to lose our focus on Christ, to be distracted by things that don't matter, and become anxious to please others besides God.

Gods knows you. He knows what we need. Faith is trusting in this fact, and living our lives accordingly. Loving one another, and making ourselves a gift and a blessing to the world. Amen

Prayers

Dear Lord we hear of so many suffering from the Virus, now diagnosed with the Long COVID illness; be with these souls Lord as they wrestle each day coming to terms with it. Faithful God, here and now, we confess to immense frustration that others too are told by doctors they are presently unable to diagnose the source of their illness. So much is lost with their illness, so much is unclear. We are sometimes hopeful, often fearful, and always wondering what is happening, and what is going to happen. We seek answers but also ask for strength and patience to live in the uncertainty of waiting.

We pray for those in the medical community who are seeking a solution. We ask blessings for their perseverance, their patience, and their wisdom. We ask your blessing for all and their families. Help me as their Priest and Bishop, and all our clergy and volunteers to know how to give comfort in this confusing and alarming situation. And yet, O Lord, most of all we ask for your peace, your perspective. Allow us, especially now, to put our full trust in you. We ask this in the name of Christ.

Amen.

(The Christian soldier in God's army. Ephesians 6:10-20)

Lord God, you have often called your people to fight. We heard your call.

Help us to hear, to listen, to understand and to respond to your call.

Lord God, help us to understand clearly for what we fight for and what we fight against, what we need to attack, and what we need to defend.

Prompt us by your Spirit, guide us by your Word, stir us up, motivate and move us. Grant us your strength, for we are hopeless and helpless on our own!

Help us to fight for the communication of the Good News to all people.

Help us to fight against all that would hinder or prevent or put off people committing to Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Help us to fight for justice, for male and female, young and old, rich and poor, white and coloured, full and hungry, those who are up and those who are down.

Help us to fight against all that is unjust, unfair, all that hurts and harms.

Strengthen us that we may strengthen, help and heal others.

Help us to fight for peace in the individual, between people, in our nation and between nations.

Help us to fight against all that destroys peace within people: disease, illegal drugs, all that is evil, all that is sin. Help us to fight against all that destroys peace between people - greed and envy, jealousy and hate.

Clothe us with your armour, Lord, so that we may fight and win, not fall and fail ourselves, others and you.

Give us truth, righteousness, the Good News of your care, the protection of your salvation. Help us to read your written Word and to live each day in the company of Jesus, your living Word. Keep us constant in prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen

The Lord's Prayer is said

The Blessing

May all our clergy, members of the Order of St James, and all our faithful congregations throughout the world find the love of God within them and around them this coming month, and the Blessing of God, Father Son † and Holy Spirit, be with you and all those whom you love, and care for now and always. Amen.

John 17 verses 6 - 19.

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

(Jesus prays) I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.

They were yours and you gave them to me and they have kept your word.

Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

All mine are yours and yours are mine and I have been glorified in them.

And now I am no longer in the world but they are in the world and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

While I was with them, I protected them in your name that not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

They do not belong to the world just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Looking at this text on its own and out of context it feels more like a theological treatise than a prayer. Hardly surprising since this Gospel was likely written somewhere between 65 and 120 CE and the author(s?) had plenty of time to sort through all the individual sayings and teachings of Jesus and put them into some kind of order, perhaps even expanding on them.

There is much dispute as to who actually wrote John's Gospel but that doesn't really matter. They may as well be called 'John' as anything else. What really matters is what the Gospel says. For me, the truth it contains gives it more than sufficient credibility than giving a name to the author. It rings true.

The Gospel is certainly much more 'spiritual' than the other three canonical Gospels, and is certainly a very sophisticated piece of writing. It isn't just an account of the life of Jesus but an exposition.

What we have in this text is well reasoned emergent and distinctly Christian theology about the very nature of Jesus as people tried to find answers to the questions regarding whether Jesus was man or God or both, what his relationship was with the Father, and what his purpose was, to name a few.

(What many don't realise is that it took over four centuries of councils to come to an agreed and definitive proposition as to who Jesus was in terms of his relationship with and to God. If you'd like some easy read information on this click [Jesus - The dogma of Christ in the ancient councils | Britannica](#))

Trying to unpick the whole text would be a mammoth task so I propose we just consider the first few stanzas of Chapter 17 verse 6 using the NIV translation. It will give us sufficient to begin with:

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."

I have expanded the text so you might see what I saw in it – I have no doubt there is so much more that can be drawn from the words ascribed to Jesus, and my words just a poor reflection of light from just one facet of a multi-cut diamond.

The context is a personal and prayerful conversation between Jesus and God, the Father. It is both real and respectfully confident, and its content apparently a summing up of a ministry thus far fulfilled, but it is as much intended as revelation as to the true nature of the relationship between Jesus the man and God the Father to those able to discern. It was not 'confidential'.

It certainly focuses on the role of Jesus as 'servant', doing the bidding of his master, God the Father. This is actually a key point to be taken seriously.

Whilst it may seem to some as being somewhat inappropriate for someone who is 'the (all powerful) Son of God' to take on a servant role, it actually makes some sense to me and it appears entirely consistent with Holy Scripture.

The first commandment is paraphrased as 'to love God completely and utterly'.

The second similarly paraphrased commandment is 'to love your neighbour as you would be loved yourself'.

The selected text is nothing less than confirmation of the outworked embodiments of those fundamental requirements outlined in the two Great Commandments.

In fact there is a blurring of the lines of division where one becomes the other and it is hard to separate them or define them without referring to the other.

It raises many questions like, how can you love God without loving those in need?

How can you know what real love is unless you have experienced the love of God?

How can you accept the love of God if you can't accept the love of those around you or from those who are closest to you?

If you deny responsibility for others then do you also deny God?

In my relationship with God, can I truly and clearly define what is God and what is 'me', or are the edges too blurred?

How can you be a person of faith if you do not reach out to others or respond to their needs?

How can you truly love someone if you let status, position, power and authority get in the way?

Let's look at the selected text and subsequent expansion, and see what it has to say or suggest:- keep in mind the two great commandments 'love God' and 'love your neighbour'.

"I have revealed you...."

- in my thoughts and actions, in my very being, I have shown you to those around me, I have been your voice, your presence and your love, I have been your ears, your eyes, your word, I have shown people your great love for them, who you are and what you are capable of, in me they have seen you in the fullest way I can offer

'.... to those whom you gave me out of the world....'

- you did not give me everyone but those who could listen and see, those who were in the world, of the world, but whose hearts secretly yearned for you, I did not question your gift nor pass judgement but gave these every opportunity, every experience to meet you and stand in your presence

'...They were yours;...'

- I had no claim over them, no authority, and assumed none as my own, but I respected and loved each of them as your creation, just as you loved them

'...you gave them to me....'

- you entrusted them to me and placed them in my stewardship, I reached out to them with the love and spiritual giftings you gave me for them, I treated them as you would, gave them everything they needed, and gave them you as you gave yourself, I did not abuse that authority you gave me, but received them unquestioningly and accepted them all, I did not despise, turn away or reject any of them or considered them unworthy

'.... and they have obeyed your word.'

- and your trust in them and in me was repaid manifold

- they, like me, became one with you.

It is in that last statement, 'they, like me, became one with you' which is the key to it all.

The closest I can get to giving an example of this in 'real life' is the moment in a marriage when we no longer talk about 'you' and 'me' but when we talk and think about things in terms of 'us'. That is when the edges become so blurred there is a one-ness even though there are two distinct parts.

I believe this is just about as close as you will get to understanding the Trinity.

There are three component and very distinctive parts or expressions of the whole:

(a) God the Father (the creative part of the One God that is consistent, all-powerful, infinite and everlasting)

(b) the Holy Spirit (the part of the One God that is within us, guiding, teaching, confirming, leading and empowering us – it is additional to our conscience)

(c) Jesus Christ (the part of the One God who became one with us and unlocks both our human (conscience/unconscious/emotional/physical/spiritual/moral/etc.) potential)

They are all distinct and separate but yet they cannot be separated for one completes and fulfils the other. One it seems cannot exist fully without the other.

A husband and a wife are two separate beings but in true marriage they become one. Although they are two separate and distinct beings, they do not simply co-exist but become so much a part of one another that they become one, so much so that without the other they know they are incomplete.

The key thing about all three examples (text, trinity, marriage) is that they do not focus on 'self'. Self takes second place every time.

It is also true of the two great commandments, 'love God....', 'love your neighbour....'

'Self' has no place in fulfilling God's purpose and indeed in fulfilling our own personal potentials.

Putting ourselves first above others actually lessens our chances of success. It seems counterproductive and contrary to worldly expectation but there it is.

Something to consider perhaps and then having considered, applying wholeheartedly. To 'love God' and serve Him is the beginning of true wisdom.

-oOo-

Prayers based on John 17, 6-19.

+David OSJ (Wales)

Mighty God, as we come before you, fill us with your Spirit, renew our vision, restore our faith, refresh your churches throughout the world. We pray for all those who are being called to serve you on church councils and across our church life. We pray that all of us will be assured that you know our hearts and will equip us with your power to serve you faithfully.

Lord of glory, change us

And we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving Lord, we pray for the leaders of the nations, remembering before you the country of India in the grip of disease and anguish. We pray that others will continue to offer aid and that our prayers will uphold them as they endure this time of turmoil. We pray for world unity and peace, united in the knowledge of your wisdom and care.

Lord of glory change us

And we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, grant that in our homes we may learn to wait upon you, and so make us sensitive to each other. As you give us gifts, may we freely share them with others.

Lord of glory change us

And we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we pray that your presence will transform our lives and we bring before you all those who are distressed in any way.

We pray for those we love the most, and for those who are struggling at this time.

Lord of glory, change us

and we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We give thanks Almighty Father that when we face death, we have hope; and we give thanks that you renew us and restore us in love.

We pray for all who have passed through death and now rejoice in life eternal.

Lord of glory, change us

and we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for your tender loving care Lord, I know, you care for us all,

You love us all, Lord, good and bad alike, and you always desire only what is for our good.

We ask you to be good to our family, to keep them all in your tender loving care.

Lord of glory, change us

and we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

How often they're weary of heart, anxious and confused in life, and they find it hard to seek your help.

We ask you to be with them, to heal and encourage them, to support and protect them. Lord, keep us always in your tender loving care.

Lord of glory, change us

and we shall be changed.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful Father,

Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Prayers based on John 17, 6-19

Fr. David Startup OSJ (UK)

Dear Lord we thank you that we can come to you just as are. We praise you that you know us completely – we do not have to pretend as you know what we are really like.

We thank you that you continue to love us – for showing us your love in Jesus. We thank you that in Jesus you shared all that this life means to us.

Thank you for understanding our many fears and we remember that you promised to be with us always.

Father, help us please when we find it hard to trust you, guide us when we lose our way, and strengthen us when we are confused and ready to give up or give in.

We pray for continuing unity in love for you, ourselves and others - and all the many benefits that brings to how we all live together – both in our own fellowship and the wider world.

We pray for a deeper understanding of the Scriptures and to be blessed with more and more of the Joy of our Father, Son and Holy Spirit and that we encourage others to seek it. 2 Cor. 3 says “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is FREEDOM.”

Lord in your mercy ***Hear our Prayer***

Lord we ask for global peace and understanding amongst all nations - particularly at this time those involved in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Please grant healing for those injured in any way - and comfort for those bereaved.

We continue to pray in a similar vein for the eradication of the corona virus and give thanks for all those involved in the care of all your people.

We do worry a lot about this Lord an awful lot – and realize that we must continue to look to you for comfort and safety.

Lord in your mercy ***Hear our prayer***

We pray for those known to us that are ill, especially.....

Please heal them, in your own way and time and give strength to those who care for them.

We pray for those who have recently died and ask that you grant them you peace and comfort the bereaved, especially.....

Lord in your mercy ***Hear our Prayer***

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, let us continue to be kind, gentle and helpful in thought word and deed to everyone we meet along our pathway of life.

In the words of Paul: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Amen.

-oOo-

Website Update:

Total page hits to 16th May are as follows:

January	17267	557 per day
February	17314	558 per day
March	30217	975 per day
April	45111	1455 per day
May (to 16 th)	29189	1824 per day

Total visitors since 03/09/2013 4221322 from 242 countries worldwide.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the protracted situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Suggested forms of approved service are available (with instructions) to download using the two new links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ (UK) Services, 2021.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

Covid-19 precautions: St Leonard's will remain closed until restrictions are fully lifted.

3rd January, 2021

7th February, 2021

7th March, 2021

4th April, 2021

2nd May, 2021

6th June, 2021

4th July, 2021

1st August, 2021

5th September, 2021

3rd October, 2021

7th November, 2021

5th December, 2021

17th January, 2021

21st February, 2021

21st March, 2021

18th April, 2021

16th May, 2021

20th June, 2021

18th July, 2021

15th August, 2021

19th September, 2021

17th October, 2021

21st November, 2021

19th December, 2021

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 7th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.