

The COLLECT for the nineteenth Sunday after TRINITY

Faithful Lord, whose steadfast love never ceases and whose mercies never come to an end; grant us the grace to trust you and to receive the gifts of your love, new every morning, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A reading from the book Leviticus.

(19.1-2,15-18)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them:

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour.

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the LORD.

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonian.

(2.1-8)

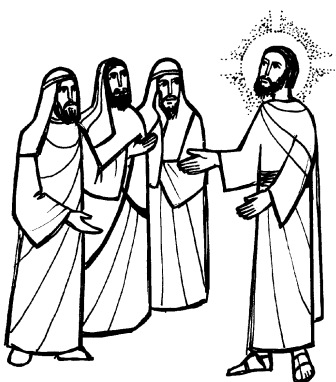
You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.

As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

(22.34-46)



When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’

He said to him, ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:

‘What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?’

They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ He said to them, How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord,

'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet' ”?

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?'

No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

I am sure that I am not the only one who has had some low moments during these last difficult months. There was the time when it was suggested that they put all the old folk into lockdown while everyone else carried on as usual. That didn't sound too bad until I realised that I was one of the old dears. Yes, I am old – just one of those in God's waiting room. Then there was that other crisis moment when they itemised those in the vulnerable category – over 80, yes that's me – over weight, yes that's me too – high blood pressure, OK that's quite enough!! I am practically dead.

Covid has brought many of us to the realisation that life is short and precarious. I am reminded of the words that I often read at the committal at the end of a funeral –

Our days are like the grass; we flourish like a flower of the field ; when the wind goes over it, it is gone and its place will know it no more.

Only then it goes on 'but' and what an enormous and wonderful 'but' it is.

But the merciful goodness of the Lord endures for ever and ever toward those who fear him.

This is our faith – this is what Jesus came to show us – death is not the end – love is eternal.

Just as Covid has made us think about the inevitability of death it also brings us to other questions – what is life about? What have I achieved? What are my priorities?

In our readings from Matthew's gospel today and over the last few weeks Jesus gives us guidance over these questions. What is really important in our lives.

Last week we were warned not to stock up on material things. 'We brought nothing in to the world and we take nothing out.' What is important is our relationship with God and the person that we have become - where we have loved.

In today's gospel Jesus unpacks this for us. He is not going to give us, or the Pharisees and Herodians of his day, rules and regulations but principles to guide us to our decisions. He challenged his hearers then and us today, to check the balance of our commitment to earthly and heavenly citizenship.

On the coin was an image of Caesar – a sign of his kingship – an indication that the coin belonged to the emperor. "Give back to Caesar that which is Caesar's."

However Jesus immediately goes on to say "And give to God what belongs to God." And so we ask – if the coin with its image of the emperor belongs to the emperor, what is it that belongs to God? Behind this statement is the understanding that each one of us is made in the image of God therefore it is we ourselves who belong to God.

Jesus was reminding his questioners that , whereas the coin in their pocket belongs to the emperor, they themselves belong to God and they must live and behave as people who belong to God. We are called to live as people who bear God's image. They should know that we are Christians by our love, by the way in which we live our lives..

As Christians our primary allegiance is to the values that Jesus proclaimed and lived. It can happen that living in accordance with the gospel can put us in conflict with the state. This was certainly true at the time of Jesus and can be seen at various times through the ages and even in parts of our world today.

We are unlikely to have that conflict ourselves. The freedom of religion and worship is enshrined in our constitution. Today, the pressure on us to compromise the values of the gospel comes not from the state but from the culture in which we live. We can find ourselves under all kinds of subtle pressures to buy into ways of doing things that are in conflict with the values of the gospel. As people who belong to God we are called to give all areas of our lives to God, to allow God and his Son to shape who we are. Yet the culture of which we are part can attempt to put a very different shape on some areas of our lives.

It is all too easy to compartmentalise – to feel God as a friend and near on Sunday – but then to ignore or be unaware of his presence on Monday.

We are called to give to God what belongs to God and that is everything – all that we are. We can do this because of all that God has given to us. God so loved us that he has gave us his Son and at the eucharist we receive again this great gift .

A long time ago now, a wise priest was helping me with what to say in a sermon. He said ‘ Just tell them God loves them’. And so that’s it – whatever life and Covid bring God loves you and knowing that, we can come to truly love Him and each other in His name. Amen

Post Communion prayer

Holy and blessed God,
you have fed us with the body and blood of your Son
and filled us with your Holy Spirit;
may we honour you, not only with our lips
but in lives dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**