

5th Sunday of Lent (A09 SCRUTINY)

The courage to share our Faith

We have just heard a long gospel. It isn't the one we expected because it is from Year A of the liturgical cycle and we are in Year B. So you might be wondering what's going on?

Well, if you have been reading your newsletter in recent weeks, you will have picked up on the fact that we have a parishioner (Melissa Cole) who is preparing, through our RCIA process, to be baptised at the Easter Vigil. As an essential part of that preparation we celebrate with her on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent what are called The Scrutinies. These are rites for self-searching and repentance. They are meant to uncover and then heal all that is weak and sinful in the heart of the candidate. That healing process can then bring out and strengthen all that is good and strong in their life. But the scrutinies are not just about the candidate, they are also very much about us. They are about how we as a community have prepared them to enter the Church and receive the gift of faith and the Sacraments. And we all have a part to play in that preparation.

For the 1st Scrutiny we heard the Gospel of the woman at the well to whom Jesus offered the living water of faith and "awakened in her heart the fire of God's love". We too are all called to hand on our faith. And Bishop Peter is reminding us of that as he shares with us his vision for our diocese.

For the 2nd Scrutiny we heard of Jesus giving sight to the man born blind. Leading not only him but also his parents and those around him, from darkness into the light of faith. It poses questions for us. "Are we helping each other to appreciate the gift of faith which we have been privileged to receive? Are we sharing and passing on our faith, or do we put it away in a safe place to be brought out only for a weekend Mass?"

Today, for the 3rd Scrutiny which we will celebrate in a few minutes, we have seen the awfulness of the death of Lazarus and the grief and confusion it caused. We have also seen Jesus showing his true humanity as he shares that grief and confusion with Martha and Mary. But then “out of the depths” of that total loss of a loved one, Jesus brings life and love and a total restoration.

Jesus told them to roll away the stone and called Lazarus out of the tomb. Today, he is calling every one of us and especially our candidate to “Come out!” of any sin that entombs us. To push away the stone of whatever blocks our way to him. Jesus is inviting us into the life changing experience of knowing him.

In the scrutinies we are praying for and with our candidate for repentance, healing, strength and faith. We are also praying for those same gifts for ourselves that through our Lenten repentance we will be forgiven and strengthened to the point where we will have the courage and conviction to share our faith with those around us. I would hazard a guess that many of us know someone who is crying out for some spiritual nourishment and comfort, some real meaning to the life which God has gifted to them. We are being urged by our Bishop to find ways of responding to their cry.

Lent is a time to think about these things and it is drawing to a close and a climax. One more week and we will be entering Holy Week, the most sacred week in our Christian calendar. But before we get there we have our Reconciliation Services on Monday in Wendover and Tuesday in Great Missenden. I do urge you to take advantage of these special opportunities to pray with and for each other as together we seek God’s forgiveness. They include individual ‘Confession’ for those who wish to avail themselves of it. But they are very much opportunities to be together in prayer for forgiveness.

Then on Wednesday evening Fr. Timothy will celebrate a Solemn Stations of the cross (here) at Wendover for the whole parish. This is in addition to the Saturday morning Stations of the Cross at Great Missenden.

These are all opportunities to help us prepare for the wonder of the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday, the harrowing awfulness of the Passion and death of Jesus on Good Friday, the emptiness and yet the great expectation of Holy Saturday and finally the shattering glory of the Resurrection at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday.

Let's join together with our RCIA candidate (Melissa) and with the whole diocese in taking every opportunity to demonstrate our faith, to prepare well for Holy Week and to welcome and receive the Risen Christ at Easter.