

5th Sunday of Lent (B09)

Moving towards Holy Week

In the past week there has been a seismic shift in opinion about how we should get ourselves out of the current economic crisis. And it all started when the Governor of the Bank of England expressed reservations about further fiscal stimulus that some said were at odds with the views of the Government. With just a few chosen words everything can change.

There has been a similar shift in the focus of our readings at Mass both on weekdays and on the remaining Sundays of Lent.

In the first three weeks of Lent we were learning how to pray, how to fast and how to share with the needy. We were also being called to repent and to ask God for forgiveness and mercy.

We have now moved into a situation where we are being forewarned about the passion and death of Jesus and at the same time we are given a foretaste of the Sacramental life that is poured out for us at Easter. Something that will be particularly visible in the baptism, confirmation and Eucharist that will be at the centre of our Easter Vigil.

All of that comes alive in today's readings where there is an emphasis on what God will accomplish in the Resurrection of Jesus after his Crucifixion and Death.

In the first reading from Jeremiah the people are promised a new covenant where the law will be written not on tablets of stone, but in the hearts of the people. There will also be a new relationship between God and his people, built on the forgiveness of sin. Through the psalm we pray for the coming of that relationship when we ask for a pure heart and a steadfast spirit.

In the reading from Hebrews we are shown Jesus as a man of prayer and suffering. We are told that it is through that prayer and suffering that Jesus learns to be obedient to the will of the Father. In the 'Our Father' we regularly pray "thy will be done" but do we really mean it? Do we really seek to put God's will ahead of our own?

In the Gospel we have some strangers asking to see Jesus. Their request provokes him to compare himself to a grain of wheat that must go into the ground and die before it can yield a rich harvest. But knowing what suffering this is likely to mean for him, Jesus admits to being troubled. Jesus is afraid but he never stops trusting in the Father; and that is his message to us at this point in Lent. Follow his example and trust in God.

So we have had much prompting and encouragement to prayer, fasting and almsgiving, all to help us clear our minds and make space so that we can properly focus on what is to unfold in these next 2 weeks.

Alongside that, in the Scrutinies that we have celebrated with our RCIA candidate, (and we had the third and final scrutiny at the 6pm Mass yesterday) (at Great Missenden), we have prayed for repentance, healing, strength and faith in our candidate. But we have also prayed for those same gifts in ourselves so that we will have the courage and the conviction to share our faith with those around us as Bishop Peter is currently urging us to do. 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.