

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Year C

27<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2010

**Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.** (Luke 9. 51-62). At this stage we could almost describe Jesus as overzealous about his determination to go to Jerusalem where he knew death awaited him. This singular vision upset the people from one Samaritan village. Would-be disciples were told straight how tough going with Jesus was—no time for establishing a home, no time for social customs and family obligations. No place for someone who wasn't as dedicated as he. Becoming a disciple was certainly hard-going! Where was Jesus' compassion? Wasn't he supposed to be compassionate (or meek and mild as the child's prayer goes)? This is a side of Jesus we don't often want to think about.

**Elisha showed the dedication required** of a disciple. (2 Kings 2.1-2, 11-20). Elisha understood that he was Elijah's successor and persisted with him until Elijah was carried into heaven. Because he was loyal, a double portion of his spirit was bestowed on Elisha. No doubt none of this story was wasted on Jesus' disciples. Remember some had thought Jesus was Elijah. The disciples may have even compared the request to that of John and James about their future reward.

**What is it to be a disciple?** Sharing the vision and energy, commitment and passion, persistence and loyalty, obedience and suffering. Yes, all of these. Yet Paul's words to the Galatians (5.1, 13-25) cast them in a new light. Discipleship is not slavery but freedom. Freedom from restricting laws, freedom from trying to please God by good works, freedom from fleshly desires. Conversely, it is freedom to love, freedom to do what we want to do, because we will want to please God by loving and serving each other, and so inheriting eternal life. St Augustine once said, "Love God and do as you please" for it will please you to be loving. True freedom is found in service.

**Sometimes Jesus' harsh words can frighten a believer;** but don't be deterred. They were said to make a point about the imperative of his mission. We must balance these with his other words and actions where he restored people to their families, where he sent people about their normal life rejoicing in health, where he found time to eat with friends. There is only one law and all else can be interpreted by it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Year C

6<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2010

**In Hebrew law,** a widow had no rights. It is a strange omission but may be explained by the belief that to die before old age was a judgement for sin which was extended to the wife that was left. To be a widow was a disgrace. Several laws did consider her plight—particularly the law which provided for marriage with her husband's brothers. But if there were no brothers or they were too poor to support her then she had no resources. Widows were frequently subject to harsh treatment.

**The widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17)** was treated shamefully and was conscious of her position (see v. 18). In a time of drought she had no support and was down to her last food. But God gave her wisdom (I have commanded a woman there to feed you) to believe Elijah and to be generous in response to his request for her last food. Her reward was a miracle—food to sustain her through that difficult time. The continuing story of the saving of her Son was another revelation to her of God's compassion and goodness—"I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is true". Creation, revelation, salvation. Here is the Trinity in action.

**The widow of Nain (Luke 7)** is another miracle where God's nature is revealed through the compassion and goodness of Jesus in raising her son from death. Again God is revealed as Lord of creation and salvation.

**In Galatians 1.11-24,** Paul provides a short autobiography. His right to be an apostle came directly from the revelation and salvation of God. God set him apart before he was born; his experience on the Damascus Road was a revelation of Jesus Christ, to save him from the life of persecution and religious zealotry which he was engaged in. Creation, revelation, salvation were his experience which empowered him for mission.

**What experience can we draw on?** How has the 'Lord of sea and sky' revealed himself to you? How has he saved you? How have you responded? How does your experience of God colour your life and empower you for ministry?

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Year C

13<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2010

**“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”**

We do often fail to recognize or to deny when we fail to live up to what is loving and decent and good; we do things which hurt others, and live lives which we know fall short in goodness and truth. Underneath we long to be put right with God, to be pleasing to God and to be at peace with God and with our fellow human beings. We crave forgiveness.

**How quick we are to judge others for their sins and how slow to forgive.** Luke 7.36-8.3 shows the gratitude of love the sinful woman had for the forgiveness of her many sins. The parable of the debtor explains that the woman's extravagant devotion was an act of gratitude for the compassion and forgiveness she had received. She could go in peace, freed of guilt, and free to sin no more. How different from the reaction of many today to 'people with a past' determined to sin no more. We hang on to reputations, we don't let them go in peace, we, ourselves, are not free of our judgmentalism. We, like Simon the Pharisee think differently from Jesus, believing that good works will achieve our righteousness. Jesus' action and his words show that grace is the way of God.

**Galatians 2.15-21 is a classic statement about justification, about being right with God.** We are justified by faith and not by works and the means of that justification comes from God's action alone, by his gracious forgiveness of our sins. Love and devotion and good works will then ensue for the justified sinner then 'lives to God' "in Christ".

**Some people question whether the message of justification suits 21st century people.** Are we concerned about this? Rather do we not think of ourselves as 'self-made people', not concerned about appeasing a judgmental God? Yet underneath this veneer of self-sufficiency we find heartbreak from disappointment, frustration, poor relationships, low self-esteem and so on, all products of the 'sin of the world'; heartbroken people waiting to be lifted up by the grace of God, our God who forgives who forgives our sins, our mistakes, our willfulness and careless disregard, for we cannot do it by ourselves. To our God of grace we give thanks.

## THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Year C

24<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2010

**Why is he feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist** regarded traditionally as being more important than the celebration of his death? The answer lies in understanding his life story in relation to Jesus. John appeared as a mission preacher on the banks of the Jordan prophesying the coming Kingdom of God and demanding repentance of sin as a preparation. He is regarded as the last of the Old Testament prophets but what is more important is his foreshadowing of Christ, his recognition of Jesus' greatness at his baptism and his understanding that his ministry needed to decrease in order for Jesus' ministry to blossom.

**By the time Luke wrote the gospel and the Book of Acts,** the place of John the Baptist in the history of God's relationship with his people was established. Luke in Acts 13 clearly has a place in the history of Jesus and by that stage the stories of a miraculous birth had found their way into the lore passed down about him. His miraculous birth story with angels, an aged mother, a dumbstruck father, and a unique name was a sign to the early Christians of the grace of God present in John even before his birth. Thus we celebrate God's grace through the celebration of his birth, also knowing the rest of his life story.

**The collect for today sums up best why we regard him as a saint.** He is a model for us to follow. We are to heed his teaching about repentance; he lived a holy life devoted to God, faithful and humble in his ministry: he spoke the truth fearlessly when he condemned Herod's adulterous marriage, and he suffered imprisonment and martyrdom for the sake of speaking out against corruption. More than all that, however, we celebrate his recognition of Jesus and what he was to become. John the Baptist pointed the way, "Behold the Lamb of God"

**Pointing the way to Jesus is a fine ministry.** We cannot convert people to Christ, for it is the Holy Spirit working in people which does that. However we too can point the way by preparing people to recognize Jesus, by encouraging them to repent of past ways and get ready to meet Jesus, hear his words, and see his power. We celebrate the Feast of John the Baptist, to remind us of humble self-denying ministry which points the way to Jesus Christ.