

Sentence

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd; I know My own and My own know Me." *John 10:14*

Collect

Jesus, Good Shepherd of the sheep, by Whom the lost are sought and guided into the fold: feed us and we shall be satisfied, heal us and we shall be whole, and lead us so that we may be with You, where You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

FIRST LESSON

Acts 4: 5 – 12

Psalm

23

EPISTLE

1 John 3:16 – 24

GOSPEL

John 10:11-18

NOTES ON THE READINGS

For most modern western people, the imagery of the shepherd is utterly foreign to their view and experience of life. While it is not hard to pick up on this imagery, most of the nuances would be lost for so few people in our culture (except perhaps for the grazier) can really relate to the harshness of the life of the shepherd. In my own part of the country, past history has some ghastly stories of shepherds here, before fences and with an often antagonistic¹ indigenous population. There is nothing either soft or romantic about the life and work of a shepherd. It was hard, lonely and largely thankless effort.

FIRST LESSON

I remember, not long ago, hearing a short talk by a minister, as he talked about the Magi – people who came to acknowledge the very truth that the truth-holders, the Jews, failed to recognize. Both that preacher and I would underline the fact that this same capacity of avoiding the evidence and hence the truth, is not limited to Jews! It is a far-too-common human failure. That is the issue underlined here. And I have to say that that particular issue is aligned with another one.

I have lost count of the number of debates I have had with the most eager of Christians, who seem to rejoice in the final verse of this passage. Their myopic vision would have it that there is no other salvation than via their remarkably narrowed vision and experience of Jesus. The reality is far more inclusive. What Jesus had come to bring is radically different approach to life, to relationships and to restoration. Through forgiveness, certainly, through integrity, through love and through justice, life can become what it was designed to be. And anyone who catches sight of the reality of that has 'come to the Father by Me.' Never lose sight of that.

Psalm

I doubt if I can offer any thoughts on this Psalm that you have not encountered before. I find it sad, actually, that this Psalm has become so familiar that for most people it is a case of in one ear and out the other. Familiarity *can* breed contempt.

Epistle

In this period of history when the wide world has become a global village, it is more than used to be necessary to take John's words to heart. We must get way past that view of the Faith that sees it as little more than an escape from responsibility for sin and the certainty of life hereafter. That bland and pathetic view of the Faith has done more than enough damage.

The action of Christ, in life, death and resurrection is NOT for me to revel in, but for us all to emulate. Knowing we are loved by God MUST lead us to a deep and abiding love for our fellow humans, and more often than not, this is a powerful challenge indeed. Christ loved the unlovely and die for them (us!)

¹ And often with good and solid reason, let it be observed.

*and we in turn must give our lives for our fellow-Christians*² It was only as Christ's self-giving was incarnated, in the real world, that it became visible, tangible, followable. And the same process has to happen for people around us to see, feel and touch, what Jesus was on about. Anything less than that is mockery.

Gospel

Now perhaps we have prepared ourselves to see a wider dimension in this stunning imagery of Jesus as shepherd. He is where the rubber hits the road; He is the One Who gets His hands dirty. He is the One Who leads the way and offers the example. Ponder that a while, if you will.

Other sheep I have. I recall, in my youth, asking my parish priest if this meant Jesus was thinking about people in other galaxies, but that really only led me to avoid facing the outsiders in my own community then. And we can still avoid the obvious. All humans (and anyone of any other part of the universe) are, *ipso facto*, my brother and sister, and I need to relate to them as I would like them to relate to me. And as I would like my Lord to relate to me!

Notes for a Sermon

It was ever so many years ago when a new Bishop was being installed in a Diocese, and preached at that event, as was fitting. His aim, fairly obviously, was to convey to the Diocese, and the clergy in particular, what he saw and understood as essential Gospel, in a world that even then was in fairly rapid change. I found his words and view of the Faith exhilarating, and making far more possible a real and solid contact with the people of the time and place. I was appalled at the time of refreshments after that service when one of my colleagues almost spat out his disgust at all that had been preached. In fairly predictable fundamentalist distaste, he thundered against 'relativist gospel' and all sorts of stuff like that. He had not listened, but had simply left his mind closed and adamant – and to my knowledge of the man, still has.

If ever there is a verse that tends to generate such myopia, it is that last verse of the first lesson this morning. *'There is no salvation through anyone else; in all the world no other name has been granted to mankind by which we can be saved.'* And before anyone has a heart attack, I report that I do not dispute the text one little bit.

The difficulty that I do have with proponents of narrow response to this text is that they tend to miss the point. What they seem to be saying is 'that unless a person has the same view, the same experience and the same limited picture (as those folk) of what is being said here, then they are on the outer, unsaved and condemned to an eternity in Hell.' [Pity the poor sods who have never even heard of Jesus, let alone have never had the same 'born again' experience.]

I ask you to come on a journey, if you will, in this Easter Season, and enter in to what both the Season and the Biblical lessons are underlining for us. Remember though that this real Biblical stuff, both in those long past days as well as now.

It is long past time that we stopped long enough to realize that there have always been thinking, wondering, inquisitive people in every race and culture, who have wondered about this business of being human and alive in this universe. Even Monty Python had a go at that wide-ranging question. I am eternally grateful that our dear old ancestor, Abraham, did exactly that, and followed the leadings of what he discovered to be God, and encouraged his kids to do the same. What Abraham had understood about life before Haran he had, largely to discard, but anyone else who has had to travel the same risky road, knows that it is no easy business to discard the familiar, even if it has proved insufficient or ineffective.

One of the rather interesting things about life and people is that those of goodwill, regardless of culture, creed or religion, look for better things in life than seem to emerge through violence, or bigotry or just plain bloody-mindedness. Through often harsh and bitter experience, they know that resolution of issues is not brought about through force, through imposition from above. We in Australia are not very familiar with such approaches to solving problems, although it seems that experience is not all that far away from any of us. Remember, the Gospel is as much for this world as it is for the world to come.

² This must read 'fellow humans,' surely.

May I revert to telling a story, real life and recent, to attempt to illustrate what I am on about (and so, I dare to say, was Jesus.) I had been asked to discuss the Faith with a mature and educated man who called himself an atheist. A friend of his was concerned about this person, who had been to one of the prestigious city Colleges. The man began his tirade - as one might have expected – against what he perceived to be the uselessness of ‘religion,’ and its tendency to narrow itself to dogma and creed.

As the discussion raged, I had to comment that my experience had not been focussed on dogma and creed, but I did ask him to look beyond his arguments. ‘What is it,’ I asked him, ‘that you as an atheist long for?’ His answer was rapid and precise, as I expected it would be. ‘When I find issues like justice and integrity the focus of people, then I will feel something useful has happened.’ The poor man was surprised when I suggested to him that we are on the same side.

‘There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.’ I find it tragic beyond imaginings that those who see themselves as the defenders of the real faith have so little understanding of the very Faith they profess.

What Jesus holds out to a world that is in crisis, a far more just and true way to live, to relate to each other, and to reach towards the possibilities in life and relationships that seems always to have been the Divine plan. As Paul expresses it in Philippians 2, Jesus proffers us all an alternative to the pattern of life and relationships that the Story of the Fall provides. There the imagery of the Adamic pattern is self-centred and self-protective. ‘You shall be like gods’ is the tempter’s challenge, and it is a challenge that seems to be almost universally taken up in our day and age. For the Gospel is hugely about reconciliation between humans and God, *and between humans and each other, and to miss the twin response is to emasculate the Gospel.*

Sentence

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us. Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:10

Collect

O God, so form the minds of Your faithful people that we may love what You command and desire what You promise, so that, amid the changes and chances of this fleeting world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

FIRST LESSON

Acts 8: 26 – 40

Psalm

22: 26 – 32

Epistle

1 John 4: 7 - 21

GOSPEL

John 15: 1 – 8

NOTES ON THE READINGS

First Lesson

This story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch has been familiar to me since Sunday School days, and that is a long time ago now. In those early days, the appeal of the story had to do with Philip racing to catch up with the chariot. Good stuff for a young kid. Add to that the mystery of Philip’s ‘disappearance’ straight afterwards, and you have a thriller. But most of the time, the real point of the story was lost on us kids.

The ‘eunuch’ business should have been enough, although one did not explain castration to kids in the 1940s and 50s. The fascinating business about this tale is the fact that there was a person of some importance in another country would have been an outcast in the Hebrew one. And yet he was a searcher after truth, and had come to Jerusalem to join in worship and learning. He was disqualified from either interest to God or attachment to synagogue, according to the Law. But it did not seem to make a lot of difference to Philip. And thank the Lord or that.

The eunuch had (somehow) managed to be reading while driving his chariot. (I find it difficult to read in the car!) And Isaiah was the focus, Chapter 53, one of the final servant songs. And once Philip made clear to the man that Isaiah was saying, the final piece of the jigsaw fitted for that man from Ethiopia. So he was baptized.³ The point of the story is that, as far as God is concerned, the person who seeks will find. And be accepted.

Psalm

If I had the fairly narrow view of the point and purpose of the Faith, then this Psalm would make little sense to me. Here is an author who is so strongly aware of that point and purpose that he saw the absolute necessity of passing on that Faith to his children and grandchildren. (Very sadly, that sort of activity seems to have lost out in generations of the recent past.

This author is aware, not only of what we might call ‘eternal’ values of the Faith, but also the great value in the here and now. If and when you and I reflect the characteristic of the Father, then life for those around us can take on a much more fresh hue and value. Here is a call to the ancient and worthy verities of real life, such as truth, integrity, trustworthiness and justice. When I know I can trust you, we can become far closer than if I cannot.

Epistle

³ Was this man the one who began the Coptic Church?

Dear old John! It is of little wonder that this Apostle became very much the elder statesman as the first century reached towards its end. Here was a man 'whom Jesus loved,' and I remain convinced that this was so because John was fairly quickly on to Jesus' wave-length. He caught sight of the important issues, which meant he could also recognize things that were not important.

Go back over this short passage and see what John was emphasising. But do it with your eyes and heart wide open. John was not limiting anyone's vision, but widening it all out.

Gospel

It is a pity in a way that much of Jesus' teaching is so familiar, because that tends to reduce the impact on us, even in this day and age. As people move away from having gardens and things, horticulture becomes something of a mystery.

First of all, the 'vine' has long been an image or icon that represented Israel, as the People of God. And that imagery underlines the intimacy, the closeness, the reflection of character that was meant to mark the Hebrew faith and its expression. But, Biblically speaking, there is also a wealth of material that speaks of the failure of Israel to live up to its calling. So pruning is here seen as a necessary activity, getting rid of the dead wood and looking for fresh new shoots. There is responsibility more than there is benefit.

This is no soft-soap 'devotional' emphasis. This is hard-headed, strong reference to the need for constant attention to the real calling.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

There is – more often than not – a sting in the tail of much of the readings for each Sunday, and today's First Lesson is no exception. The story is very familiar, the imagery is vivid, and the outcome a delight, but rather too few readers are aware of the radical impact this story would have had on the Infant Church. So let's try and enter in to that impact.

As in most religions, Judaism had its rather strong shield around its Faith, with strong and demanding requirements for anyone wishing to be involved. It was reasonably OK for people of a Hebrew background, but for outsiders, the challenge was demanding indeed. There was a long process of testing and learning, that rather harsh business of circumcision for a male contender, and overriding it all was the expectation that anyone wishing to enter such 'holy ground' had to be complete physically without any illness or defect.

It says a very great deal for that Ethiopian, that he had travelled as far as he did, to take whatever part he could in Jewish ritual, even though his access would have been limited strictly to the Court of the Gentiles, in the Jerusalem Temple. He would have encountered all manner of taboos and restrictions, and the greatest barrier to his acceptance in any degree would have been the fact that he was eunuch. Neuter. Castrated, not to put too fine a point on it. He would have been as welcome as the proverbial pork chop in a synagogue. Israel had a very long history of having little or nothing to do with such 'damaged goods.' Anyone who has suffered isolation at the hands of very holy Christians will have some idea of the 'negative vibes' that would have been pointed at him in order to discourage him, slow him down, get him out of the picture. Like someone with AIDS, someone 'gay,' someone imputed (usually quite falsely,) with some sort of evil intent. That man must have had remarkably thick skin, so to speak, and a huge determination to search for truth regardless of the contrary pressure aligned against him.

One might take a punt that he would have found it difficult in his own country and culture. There in his native Ethiopia, he may well have been regarded as different, somewhat odd-ball, possibly untrustworthy. Obvious his Queen held him in high regard, even if few others did. Anyhow try to get picture of the real person.

I give enormous respect to the actions of Philip – even if it was at the urging of the Spirit. I would not have been surprised if Philip had his reservations, because at the very least, his possibly bigotted background would have that sense of reserve about going against the grain, so to speak, in having anything to do with such a bloke.

What delights me most of all is the way, obviously, this man had come at the Faith and the Scriptures in such a fresh manner that he saw the importance of Isaiah's Servant Songs, and Chapter 53 in particular. From what I understand of Jewish theology, this passage did not seem to rate very highly. It is rather often the case that a person who comes fresh to something, without all the baggage others might have, sees through to the heart of things much quicker. This bloke certainly did.

And dear old (young actually) Philip was also honest enough to see past the hang-ups to focus on the important things. All that Philip did with that man, including his baptism, would have gone right against the grain of Jewish and even Christian thinking.

Sentence

Jesus said, 'You did not choose Me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit.'

John 15:16

Collect

Loving God, Your Son has chosen us and called us to be His friends: give us grace to keep His commandments and to love one another, and to bear fruit which will abide; through Him Who is the true vine, the source of all our life, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

FIRST LESSON

Acts 10: 44 – 48

PSALM

98

EPISTLE

1 John 5: 1 – 12

GOSPEL

John 15: 9 – 17

NOTES ON THE READINGS

First Lesson

For anyone unfamiliar with the story of Cornelius, it would be helpful to read Acts 10 from the start, for then the fuller picture will become clear. Mind you, one needs to be aware of the fact that behind this story lies an enormous challenge to the Apostles, and Peter in particular. It was a matter of facing one's prejudices and having to come to terms with their demolition. This is never a pleasant experience for anyone.

We read last week about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch; and noted then that the important man from the south would have been an absolute *persona non grata* within Judaism because he had been emasculated. Such people then were about as popular as gays or HIV people have been these days.

In Peter's situation, there is a parallel. Not only were 'deviates' unwelcome; Gentiles, especially Romans, suffered the same fate. Even Cornelius, who had shown himself to be what were then called 'god-fearers,' would have been unacceptable. So people in the Infant Church were confronted with people, normally unacceptable people, wanting to be part of the People of God. And a decision had to be made. The hardest part of that decision was overcoming all the inbuilt traditional views that had been held to firmly for centuries. Such views become sacred cows, as they say. And sacred cows are defended, not by logic or even theology, but sometimes almost insanely. These are the hardest sacred cows to dislodge.

But dislodge they did, as the unfolding story of Acts reveals. And while it was not without pain and anger, the question was resolved, and *resolved against the ancient and long-held traditions*. [If that had not happened, you would not even be aware that there had been a Church. It would have disappeared within a generation or two.]

PSALM

It is always a wonder to me how people can recite Psalms in Church and have not a clue what they are saying. Is this because they expect not to understand, or is it because they assume it will have nothing to do with them? Or is it because they are quite sure that it is all a block of nonsense and a waste of time really.

The sorts of sentiments expressed in this Psalm are really quite interesting and important. Here the author is rejoicing in the 'faith once delivered' in his (or her!) day and age, as it impinges on life as then lived. Mind you, there is no explosive effect, but a quiet and confident one.

What the author is rejoicing in, is the fact that with God as God, a person can be sure, in the final analysis, that truth will win over falsehood, and justice over torts. While he may not be looking at minor issues of his time, he is certainly looking back over history as he knew it, and finding his certainties there. It is always in the real world that God is at work, but that working is never by force.

In our world, there are very many people who despair of any truth or justice, or even sense or purpose in life, so there is no room for joy, and space only for hopelessness. That cannot be so for the Christian.

EPISTLE

There is little doubt that the modern reader will have quite some difficulty in being clear about what the author is on about here. Clearly, he is on about love, and God's love in particular, but when he goes on about water and blood and so on, confusion is near at hand. Basically, John is pointing to the evidence, clear evidence, of the truth and validity of Jesus' life and ministry. The water and blood bit has to do with the fact that Jesus' ministry was in the real world and in real time. It down to earth, and testable by anyone. The triple witness evidence has to do with the Jewish concept that one witness to an event is insufficient, and even two can be misleading. Three is the effective minimum, and these the author produces. So it is love that carries the day, and few could have any disagreement or difficulty with that statement. Victory comes to the follower of Christ, because to put it in the simplest and most straightforward of terms, Jesus is the only one Who makes sense of this strange business called life. And what one has to do to establish the truth or falsehood of the Gospel is to stick their neck out and have a go. The evidence of that will establish the truth or otherwise.

GOSPEL

Try putting this passage in front of your pagan friends! It looks like absolute garbage on the surface, for if ever there was a riskier way of living than to care about others, they will not know a worse one. In the world these days, it really does seem to be a matter of looking out for Number One and the rest can go to wherever.

And whilst that may sound like a safe way to live and travel, it is the sort of attitude to life and others that has created the tense, dangerous and even violent world in which we live. SO the Gospel may sound like sheer stupidity at first glance, but on pondering a little deeper, it is not anywhere near as silly as it sounds. In fact, it is very sensible and valuable indeed.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

We humans are a very strange lot, sometimes. We Christians can actually become something more than a joke, also. What I am on about is our capacity to discuss, debate and argue over some issues, totally content to go on with the arguing and debate, because we feel certain that we are accomplishing something – when we know damn well we are doing nothing of the sort. We are malingering. Pussy-footing. Wasting time, and effort and energy.

If there is one thing that hits me between the eyes in this set of readings, it is the simple impact of that first lesson. Peter had a problem; Cornelius epitomised that problem, and that meant that Peter could no longer prevaricate but had to do something about it. **And he DID!**

It is always so very hard for us humans to work our way past and beyond our comfort zones. Peter found that, too. It is a strange thing, that while Peter was brought up – one might assume – at the Sea of Galilee, and that meant 'out in the sticks,' he still seemed to have absorbed the very Jewish hang-ups with his mother's milk, so to speak. One of the less attractive aspects of Judaism then was its capacity to regard any other human being not Jewish, as way beyond the pale. (Christians still do it, especially to each other!) It was one of those unwritten but strongly held biases that stuck in the bellies of almost every Jew.

If you consider that to be too strong, then you may be too young to know that well this side of World War 11, Catholics and Protestants hated each other. Despised each other. Kids in particular carried on the warfare. I was in that! None of us knew quite what the issues were, but we upheld them. As recently as early '60s, the same bigotry was well in evidence. I could point you to a pastor even now who is convinced that Catholics are evil.

Back to Peter. Cornelius was Roman, an army man, and even if he was what the Jews then called ‘a god-fearer,’ Peter would have found it very hard indeed to see Cornelius in warm human terms. He could not have found it comfortable even to have been in his house. And yet all the evidence pointed to the fact that Peter’s bigotry had to be demolished, demounted, put down. (Last Sunday’s First Lesson gives quite some of the picture.)

The evidence was so clear and strong that Peter was forced to see that here was a genuine candidate for baptism. All Peter’s reserve had to be removed. One does not do that sort of thing without a great deal of thought and prayer, and even then it remains difficult. But the factor in which I delight was that Peter did not turn this situation into a subject to discuss and debate endlessly. He was impelled to do something about it. So Cornelius was baptised. *Now if you cannot build something valuable on that, then*

Sunday 28th May, 2006

Seventh Sunday after Easter
Sunday after the Ascension

Sentence

Jesus prayed, 'Holy Father, protect them in Your Name that You have given Me, so that they may be one as we are one.'

John 17:11

Collect

Almighty God, Your blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, ascended far above the heavens that He might fill all things; mercifully give us faith to trust that, as He promised, He abides with us on earth until the end of time, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever.

Amen

FIRST LESSON

Acts 1:15 – 17 & 21 – 26

PSALM

1

EPISTLE

1 John 5: 9 – 13

GOSPEL

John 17: 6 – 19

NOTES ON THE READINGS

If ever you thought it was easy (a) to understand the readings and (b) to catch sight of why particular passages were chosen for a particular day, this set of readings will muck up your little expectations ever so nicely. Mind you, the Sunday after the Ascension is a far-from-easy thing to come to terms with, as it would have been for the Apostles. It was becoming a matter of sink or swim!

FIRST LESSON

If you are game, try and put yourselves in the position of the Eleven. Jesus had returned to the Father and there they were, alone and somewhat rudderless. It was an awful position in which to be, but there are times when one has to be cruel to be kind. Jesus had to break free of the apron-string pulling disciples and they had to be dropped in the deep end. There is nothing like such an experience to increase a learning curve.

Mind you, I have always had a cynical turn of mind when I watch the Eleven find out what they should be doing. Their experience is echoed again and again in modern times, too. **What do you do when you do not know what to do? Form a committee and try and find an agenda.**

Can't you just imagine it. There was an obvious problem to solve, and Peter was just the man for the job. Judas had topped himself, and ruined the traditional number of chosen ones. Twelve it should be; twelve it was from time immemorial, and twelve it shall be again. It was all very Biblical and all very properly done, and Matthias was elected the ersatz Twelfth Man. *And we never hear of him again in the pages of the New Testament. Does that ring any bells for you?*⁴

PSALM

Is there any need to comment on this first and most direct of psalms? While moderns may disagree with the sentiments expressed, there can be no difficulty with what is being conveyed. It may well be that some believers find it hard to see any real evidence of the second half of the last verse, it has to be said that there have not been too many 'ungodly' people whose efforts are still cherished.

EPISTLE

As most of this material is repeat from last week, I will refrain from further comment.

⁴ If anyone filled the twelfth spot it was Paul, but that was a long way ahead in time at this point.

GOSPEL

If you find that this High Priestly Prayer of Jesus is somewhat difficult to follow and to come to terms, then you would not be alone by any means. This soliloquy is difficult to follow, yet important to try and absorb.

In fairly interesting Johannine terms, there is the contrast offered between faith and apostasy, and world and life. Perhaps the most powerful of the comparisons is between falsehood and truth. Although it may sound a little simplistic, the real issue of the Gospel is the need to respond to the truth in whatever situation one finds oneself.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

It was a conversation that really started from nothing much. We were chatting about the propensity that a lot of people seem to have these days, for a sort of faith that while appearing to be Biblical, is essentially little other than 'feel good' stuff. Actually we were talking about a fairly popular video course on the Christian Faith, and the number of people who delight, apparently, in going through the programme again and again. Little progress is ever seen in those dear people, but there is a lot of clucking and cooing.

In the notes above I have referred to the difficulty lots of people have trying to come to terms with that High Priestly Prayer of Jesus, as in today's Gospel. All that talk about making God's Name known, and belief and prayer and all sorts of religious stuff. Nice sort of territory to get involved in, and so avoid the realities of life and faith, eh!

However, it is fairly clear, is it not, that Jesus was on about His concern that those who were His disciples should remain true to the Gospel, as time went by. Jesus was painfully aware of the pressure on people of faith to turn away from it. Far easier to get with the strength, and let the important issues fall by the wayside. *And this is the real point of Jesus' prayer.*

You will have had to do with people who have made a great show of becoming Christian, and carry on for some time, then quietly fade away into the background. And you never hear of them again. I would not mind a quid for the number of people I have had to do with who start off very nicely and noisily – and disappear. It is not often a matter of belief or unbelief. It is often much more a matter of finding the Faith meet them *initially* at their point of need, but then offers them a challenge in directions they are not prepared to head. How would it have been if Jesus had started off with a flourish, and then faded ff into the middle distance?

I am no longer in the world; they are still in the world. And there lies the real issues, the hard spots, the point at which one has to face reality or get out. Obviously, in Biblical terms (or Johannine ones) the world is all that sets itself over and against Gospel and God, over and against truth and justice and integrity and compassion. About care and concern for others. Don't bother to look back to NT times to understand what Jesus was on about; look around you now. There was once a time, if you are old enough to look back to such times, when anyone in trouble had a lot of support from neighbours, family, friends. Even the local community would be supportive. Now it is a question of whether there is a quid in it for me, or not. It is a question of 'I am in control and you do what I tell you.'

The battle between those two ideologies, if you like, seems to me to be very much more significant these days than before. Sometimes, others will make you feel idiotic if you break rank to give someone a hand. And if you step outside the particular mores of your community to help someone regarded as outsider, then you may well be in all sorts of bother. It takes the strong person to cast aside the noisy protests of one's peers.

Have you ever stopped to realize the enormous risk that our Lord took when, after Crucifixion and Resurrection, He left the infant Church and its adherents, to carry on from where He left off? It was an enormous risk! It could easily have gone pear-shaped, and collapsed in the sort of conflict with each other to which we humans are heir. It could have been torn into shreds as different strong characters tried to take over and control the Infant Church. It could easily have been lost in the chaos of spirituality and vagueness that afflicted part of the Roman world as it seems to be doing worldwide these days. Whatever, simply stop and

ponder the dilemma that faced Jesus as He faced the on conclusion of His earthly ministry. Jesus needed to pray about it all, and we humans needed all the prayer we could get.

Commitment is the word for it. And that is becoming rather rare in this world that worships ego and despises anyone lower on the scale. But that is what is needed, for the world at large let alone the Church-in-the-world, and that should give us furiously to think.