

Reflection for Sunday 4th October 2020

It seems as if Autumn has become noticeable in the last few days, after a very pleasant start to the week. Taking a walk along Littlehampton seafront on Monday felt like a summer's day, even though the end of the holiday season was being marked by the dismantling of the 'Big Wheel' and is no longer a landmark in the view down to the coast from Cathedral House. Although it is a season in its own right and has its own tasks to perform, I always think of Autumn as a preparation for winter, like Advent to Christmas. There is a beautiful canticle in the Morning Prayer of the Church for the first week of Sunday. It is part of the song of the three young men praising God for their rescue from the '*burning fiery furnace*' of King Nebuchadnezzar. From the book of Daniel, it is a hymn of praise and some verses seems fitting for the time of year: "*And you, showers and rain, O bless the Lord. To him be highest glory and praise for ever. And you, all you breezes and winds, O bless the Lord...*"¹ It is a reminder to give thanks to God in all weathers, seasons, and circumstances. Easier said than done, I know, but we make a connection with God's love when we give him thanks and praise. Remembering the Canticle of the creatures another connection we could make is with St. Francis of Assisi, whose feast day occurs today, although the Sunday celebration will take precedence this year. We wish the community of Poor Clares, at Crossbush and the other Franciscan orders in our Diocese a happy feast day. St. Francis is associated with care for the environment, but also with a concern for the poor and the vulnerable.

This is a connection which will be a concern for many as the by-product of the '*lockdown*' and as further social distancing restrictions are maintained and introduced. If this has not touched us directly, it does so indirectly as we learn from family and friends and the media the difficulties that others face. The Prophet Isaiah, in our first reading, says the Lord expected the vineyard to yield grapes, but all that it produces is sour grapes instead. He says: "*My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted choice vines in it. In the middle he built a tower, he dug a press there too. He expected it to yield grapes, but sour grapes were all that it gave.*"² If we substitute the word *Church* for *vineyard* we get a sense of what the Lord might be saying to us through these readings. Produce the good fruit, the grapes that can be eaten and turned into wine – a symbol of life in Christ. We will not be able to solve every problem that comes our way, but we have Jesus Christ to offer and the foundation of love and meaning he gives to each life. It was worrying to hear a young man on the radio say, *what is the meaning of my life without a job?* Employment and all that it brings to health, well-being, self-esteem, and economic security is essential. Church teaching is clear about this: "*In considering the moral implications that the question of work has for social life, the Church cannot fail to indicate unemployment as a 'real social disaster', above all with regard to the younger generation.*"³ We must do all that we can to help safely rebuild our economy but at the same time strengthen peoples belief in their dignity as created and loved by God, irrespective of economic status.

The kingdom of God gives that message, the father's loving message for all people is Jesus Christ. This is the fruit that is to be produced, the ripe grapes rather than the sour ones. The Autumn winds and rains have arrived and so, it seems, have the economic winds and rains. It will get colder as winter advances. But our hearts can remain warm because we know that God has not forgotten or abandoned us, and Jesus is the fruit we offer to others. We can try and lift the soul of others with that message and also offer practical help, when and where we can.

¹ Dan 3:56-88,

² Is 5:1-7

³ St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*

18, in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, Bloomsbury, p148

The kingdom has been given to us “*to produce its fruit*” we thank God for a sustaining faith with the three young men set free in the ‘*burning fiery furnace*’. We believe that Jesus is the foundation, the cornerstone, of the kingdom in which all may find shelter from the storms that are circulating and so work with him to produce that fruit in our lives and Parish community.

God bless you, Canon David