

The First Sunday after Trinity – a liturgy for worship at home

Introduction

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel today we are brought face to face with the subject of evil. Do we recognise the share we may have in the evil that is rampant in the world? Once we recognise that we do share some of the guilt, there is much hope that with God's help we may contribute our share towards doing away with evil in ourselves and around us and making the world a better place. In this Eucharist let us ask the Lord for this insight and strength.

Act of Penitence

In some greater or lesser way we share in the evil of sin. Let us call to mind our shortcomings and ask for the Lord's forgiveness.

Lord Jesus, you reconcile us to one another and to the Father:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you heal the wounds of sin and division:
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you intercede for us at the right hand of the Father:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, be merciful to us when we go astray from your ways of love, forgive us, make us whole and new again, and keep us on the road towards everlasting life. Amen.

Act of Praise

The Gloria as follows, or some other hymn of praise:

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

O God, the strength of those who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's readings

A reading from the book of Genesis

(3: 8 – 15)

The man and the woman heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;

he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

For the word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 130

Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord; Lord hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

If you, Lord, were to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you shall be feared.

I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.

My soul waits for the Lord, more than the night watch waits for the morning.

O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy;

With him is plenteous redemption and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (4: 13 – 5: 1)

Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Acclamation to greet the Gospel:

Alleluia, alleluia.

Those who love me will keep my word, says the Lord.

And my Father will love them, and we will come to them.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (3: 20 – 35)

Glory to you, O Lord.

The crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When Jesus' family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for they were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Be-el'zebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."

And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

For the Gospel of the Lord: Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

There was a mixture of joy and sorrow, relief and disbelief, celebration and anger among the people of the United States after the presidential election last November. But what happened afterwards in the 'land of the free' was truly shocking. In a country founded on the most noble and tested of democratic traditions and institutions, which is still a rare gift in the world of today, the defeated incumbent, who knew very well that he had been defeated, nevertheless chose to promote and perpetuate the lie that the election had been stolen from him and he refused to engage with his elected successor and the time-honoured process and protocols of the transition. This charade was a terrible witness to a world where democracy is fragile or non-existent, and where elections are commonly manipulated to ensure that power never changes hands. That the leader of the free world should try to follow that course was most discouraging and disappointing, to put it mildly. Worse still, millions of people chose to believe the lie, and confusion and chaos ensued. At home, a nation divided against itself as the leadership attempted to turn the truth into a lie.

That is more or less a modern-day version of what is going on in today's Gospel reading. Jesus has been doing works of healing and deliverance, but the religious authorities are putting it about that he is working through the power of the devil. He describes such an accusation against him as blasphemy. Usually, blasphemy means saying rude or hostile things about God, but Jesus is saying that this blasphemy is much worse. When people who were sick or demon-possessed came to him, he prayed in the Holy Spirit for their healing, and they were healed. To say that it was not the Holy Spirit but rather the power of evil was not simply a sin but an unforgivable sin. So Jesus asks them, 'How can Satan drive out Satan?' Knowing full well that Jesus' works were godly, they were unwilling to accept the consequences of that knowledge and preferred to go with the lies. It suited their exclusive religious outlook their dim view of those whom Jesus healed. They had put themselves beyond forgiveness by refusing to acknowledge truth which they knew to be truth.

Throughout the Bible we read of the importance of individual responsibility. We are all responsible for our attitudes and our actions. However, this did not stop Christians down the ages from developing elaborate theories of how we have all inherited the sin of Adam just by being born, the sin we read about in our first reading. In the days when Adam was thought to be an historical individual, his disobedience came to be regarded as the original sin that infected the whole human race.

The word 'Adam' in fact means the human race. The Genesis parable tells how God intended human beings to be immortal. He placed them in a paradise world represented by the Garden of Eden, and apart from one or two conditions he gave them free will to decide how to behave. But they disobeyed his command and made bad choices. So God punished them by taking away their immortality, and they and all their descendants including you and me would have to work to survive, have the experience of pain and live for only a limited number of years. It is an important lesson for us, telling us about the negative capabilities in human nature and the problems that are caused when we are self-centred and greedy.

To a certain extent human beings are born self-centred in order to survive. The example of others often predisposes us to live selfishly, and the influence of family, society and culture constrains us. But it does not remove our free will. We may often be ashamed of the sins of our parents or ancestors, but sin and guilt cannot be inherited. We all have individual responsibility for how we live, what we do and what we do not do. The choice is ours.

Yes, to some extent we all need help to be 'turned around,' to have our eyes opened to our misguided priorities and be able to refocus. Jesus came to offer us a pattern for living life in this world and show us how much God has always loved us and longs for us to live in his likeness as his children who reflect his values. In the Gospel, Jesus teaches that anyone who does the will of God is a member of his family. It was in obeying the will of God that Jesus was able to change so many lives for the better. His mission ultimately took him to the cross because his obedience to God also led him to confront the self-seeking, corrupt and unjust powers of his day, including such as were in his audience in today's Gospel scene, those who chose lies over truth.

Jesus' resurrection confirms God's rejection of such people and their ways, and God's acknowledgement and approval of the loving and life-enhancing ways of Jesus.

As human beings and especially as Christians we have a duty to live responsibly and with a self-giving disposition that helps to create harmony and community. We can do this by co-operating with the God who created us, whose grace is freely given and abundantly sufficient for us. By faithfully following Jesus we discover perfect freedom, and the power to live as children of God, called to help build a world which reflects our loving Father's vision and values, a world and a life which Jesus called the kingdom of God.

A few moments of silent reflection are recommended.

The Profession of Faith, either the following or one of the traditional creeds:

We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, we ask that you guide your Church world wide especially when differences amongst us seem to threaten our very existence. We face each other, but often do not see the face. We too easily make “an other” of one another. Help us now to look again, to see Jesus in the face and to recognise hopes, aspirations and desires.

Guide and protect Archbishop Justin, and Bishops Robert and David; lead them in the ways of truth and love. We pray for our church of St Francis; for John, Marisha, our council and all who work tirelessly behind the scenes for your Glory.

Lord, in your mercy...**Hear our prayer**

Creator God, we are part of the tensions and injustices of the world: heal the resentments that fuel the world’s conflicts and poor relationships. We pray for the countries of the world who are engaged in war, may their hearts be so softened that they will seek peace and reconciliation. Especially we pray for the Holy land, that justice, fairness and peace will prevail and all citizens will grow to live in harmony.

Help us all to walk humbly with you at our side and when we come to the crossroads and must choose which way to go, lead us along the path of justice and righteousness whilst steering us away from the road that leads to selfishness and sin.

Lord, in your Mercy..... **Hear our prayer**

Father God, help us to be gentle, with others and with ourselves. Give us, we pray, the calm that makes for consideration and the respect for others that makes us courteous. Take from us hard words and the cynical looks and attitudes. Let us be to others as we would wish them to be to us and, when we fail, forgive us and when they fail, heal us. We pray for our families, especially those from whom we have been separated during the pandemic. May the bond of love remain strong as we work towards normality once again.

Lord, in your Mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Caring God, we pray for all those who are afflicted by physical, emotional or mental illness. Help them to keep their eyes fixed on you, and give them the courage to face the trials and temptations that may come. We pray all who support and care for them; give them love, patience and understanding during difficult times. We remember all who work in traumatic and lifesaving situations that they may have courage and stamina.

Lord, in your Mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Holy God, your love reaches beyond the grave. At the end of our days on earth be with us and with those we love, and with those we love who have gone before us. In a moment of silence we pray for those who need your healing touch upon their lives, including Carol Hart and Margery Lee; and for the families and friends of those who have recently died (*pause*).

Lord, in your Mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Gracious God, we thank you for hearing our prayers and as we move into the coming week help us to remember our Saviour's words as he sent his disciples out into the world "As you go, proclaim the good news, the Kingdom of God has come near".

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

With Jesus we pray that we may forgive others and God forgives us:

Our Father.....

You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.
May your body and blood be my food and drink.
May your passion and death by my strength and life.
Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.
May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.
Let me not run from the love which you offer
but hold me safe from the forces of evil.
On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.
Keep calling to me until that day comes
when, with your saints, I may praise you for ever. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

God of our pilgrimage, you have willed that the gate of mercy should stand open for those who trust in you: look upon us with your favour that we who follow the path of your will may never wander from the way of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you, and with all those you love and pray for, today and always. Amen.

Let us go in peace and walk with one another the road of reconciliation.
Thanks be to God.