

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER. YEAR A 2020.

The faithful here at St Mary's will be familiar with the procedure for the beginning of Mass. After the notices are given, Steven or Bradley will say, "When the bell is rung we stand to say the first hymn". I am sure many Churches will have similar ways of letting the faithful know that the service is about to begin. I like the liturgical form of many of the churches of the Eastern Tradition. The service begins when the Deacon announces "it is time; It is time to begin the service to the Lord blest master," as he turns to the priest.

This tradition goes back to St Chrysostom and his guidance to the deacons. It was time to begin, time to act because when everyone had assembled Christ was about to act and manifest his presence. What is significant about this acclamation is the Greek word that is used for time, Kairos. Kairos is literally Gods time, not to be confused with how mortal man determines time which is Chronos. From it we get such words as chronology. What the Deacon is proclaiming therefore is the intersection of chronological time, chromos, as we determine it, with God's time Kairos, the eternity to which all who are participating in worship is drawn. The liturgy is the place where eternity and infinity meet the time bound and the finite.

When we are gathered for worship, particularly the sacrament of Christ's body and blood we are stepping out of our own time, with all its limitations and dead ends, false starts and disappointing endings, into God's time of realised hope, fulfilled promises and things revealed that were once hidden and beyond our understanding; the land where our world wearied selves find a place to breathe for we are where we belong, eternity. It is from here that when we do have to return to our linear finite existence we do so enlivened, hopeful and longing for that day when we are permanently living in Kairos time, Gods time.

The most wonderful example of this is the unfolding narrative of the two disciples on their way to the village of Emmaus. Within the confines of time, chromos time, our time, these two men were brought to a point where all they had come to hope for, all the security that they had felt, all the ways they had thought that they had advanced as persons of faith and in their growing

realisation of how God was revealing Himself and His vision for all of creation, had come crashing down because of the unfolding of events over a relatively short space of time. The narrative gives us every indication into the way these two disciples were trying to make sense of the past few days. We are told that they were moving away from Jerusalem. This is very telling. They were turning their backs on the place of God's presence, the Holy City. At one time all was hope, now all was hopeless. Chronos time had brought them to the conclusion that life is indeed hopeless, a tale of woe ultimately told by idiots. The answer to their question "what is the goal of goodness, the end of hope?" was now, as time had revealed, nothing more than a cross and a dead messiah.

What was the result of all their prayers, their longings, their fellowship; Nothing but disappointment and emptiness and fragmented friendships. These are situations that are common to all who tread in the footsteps of faith. How often have we wondered about whether prayers are effective, when nothing seems to happen? When well laid plans are shattered by personal disaster or circumstances beyond our control? How often are we disappointed by our fellow companions in life or have been let down by the faith community that should know better? These are all familiar moments in our histories bracketed by our births and our deaths. These are the experiences of time. No different to that which was being expressed by those two disciples.

But then, right across this moment of verifiable, historical time cuts the person of the glorified and risen Jesus. Now all of a sudden Kairos, Gods time intersects the finite. And there is a change in demeanour; the disciples feel within their physical bodies that this stranger is transformative. He begins to expound the scriptures and this becomes a catalogue of the many times that God has already intersected ordinary time with his promise of salvation and eternity. And then Jesus shows them the real glory of God as he brings into the very heart of that evening meal, the sacrificial meal that is the ultimate gateway and invitation into the kingdom, into eternity, the abode of God's time.

That step into eternity, made possible in broken bread and wine outpoured, transformed those disciples and transformed the events that they had put down to the fickleness of life having to be lived out in a time frame that seemed to have no meaning. Having glimpsed what God was doing outside of

ordinary time, and what he is always doing, those same disciples were able to return to Jerusalem to the others who had also been allowed to see the glory that shines through the chaos of our short and sometimes disappointing existences.

Emmaus is ultimately about seeing beyond the veil into God's eternal vision. When we lose sight of this we are left to succumb to a life that seems to be arbitrary and without meaning; life that can sign post many promising journeys and conclusions that are nearly always thwarted by one thing or another. The resurrection of Jesus and the sacramental life that he has left the Church, his teachings and his holy men and women are the antidote to this nihilism. Because they are infused with God's time, and God's time is about salvation and the bliss of being in his company for all eternity.

Amen