

Sunday 24th May – Sunday after Ascension

Opening hymn – Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour

Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour
First-begotten from the dead,
Thou alone, our strong defender,
Liftest up thy people's head.
Alleluia, alleluia,
Jesu, true and living bread.

Here our humblest homage pay we,
Here in loving reverence bow;
Here for faith's discernment pray we,
Lest we fail to know thee now.
Alleluia, alleluia,
Thou art here, we ask not how.

Paschal Lamb, thine offering, finished
Once for all when thou wast slain,
In its fullness undiminished
Shall for evermore remain,
Alleluia, alleluia,
Cleansing souls from every stain.

Life-imparting heavenly manna,
Stricken rock with streaming side,
Heaven and earth with loud hosanna
Worship thee, the Lamb who died,
Alleluia, alleluia,
Risen, ascended, glorified!

Easter greeting

Alleluia, Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Praise – Psalm 68:1-10, 32-end

- 1 Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered;
let those that hate him flee before him.
- 2 As the smoke vanishes, so may they vanish away;
as wax melts at the fire,
so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.
- 3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God;
let them make merry with gladness.
- 4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
exalt him who rides on the clouds.
The Lord is his name; rejoice before him.
- 5 Father of the fatherless, defender of widows,
God in his holy habitation!
- 6 God gives the solitary a home
and brings forth prisoners to songs of welcome,
but the rebellious inhabit a burning desert.
- 7 O God, when you went forth before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,
- 8 The earth shook and the heavens dropped down rain,
at the presence of God, the Lord of Sinai,
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
- 9 You sent down a gracious rain, O God;
you refreshed your inheritance when it was weary.
- 10 Your people came to dwell there;
in your goodness, O God, you provide for the poor.
- 32 Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;
make music in praise of the Lord;
- 33 He rides on the ancient heaven of heavens
and sends forth his voice, a mighty voice.
- 34 Ascribe power to God, whose splendour is over Israel,
whose power is above the clouds.
- 35 How terrible is God in his holy sanctuary,
the God of Israel, who gives power and strength to his people!
Blessed be God.

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Collect for Sunday after Ascension

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father.

Amen

Readings

Acts 1:6-14

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you

have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.'

Sermon – Rev Dr Theresa Jones

How are you with prayer? Is it something with which you start your day? A regular pattern that forms part of your daily routine? On the other hand, is it something you find hard work? Is it something, there mere thought of which, fills you with lethargy? Is it something in which you find little meaning? To these last three questions I would say, you're not alone.

At such difficult times as these, questions of doubt can arise in our minds. There may be doubts about whether there is a loving God as we learn of the challenges created by the Corona Virus. As we witness the heartbreak in families brought on by the illness or death of loved ones. So, we may feel there is little point in praying.

However, we **can** take encouragement from our gospel reading today, for here we have Jesus praying **for us**. In fact, the whole of chapter 17 gives us Jesus at prayer. He uses the words 'glorify your Son'. What can that mean?

Not entirely what we might expect because the glorifying of which Jesus speaks, on this occasion, is to do with his crucifixion. He's praying that his mission to the world would be made known through the cross. Although the cross is a symbol of suffering it's also a symbol of victory. Jesus also prays to be

restored to the glory he had before his Incarnation: before he came into the world. He then prays earnestly for those who believe in him and asks for protection for them. That's good news in our present world crisis. But he also goes on to pray for unity among his followers.

Although unity may have been sadly lacking in the past all of a sudden we're coming together in the most amazing ways. We're certainly united in terms of staving off the Corona Virus. We're united in valuing our health service and united in longing for a good outcome, for the day when children and young people can safely go back to school, college, or university, when businesses can reopen and when Care Homes become places of safety rather than danger.

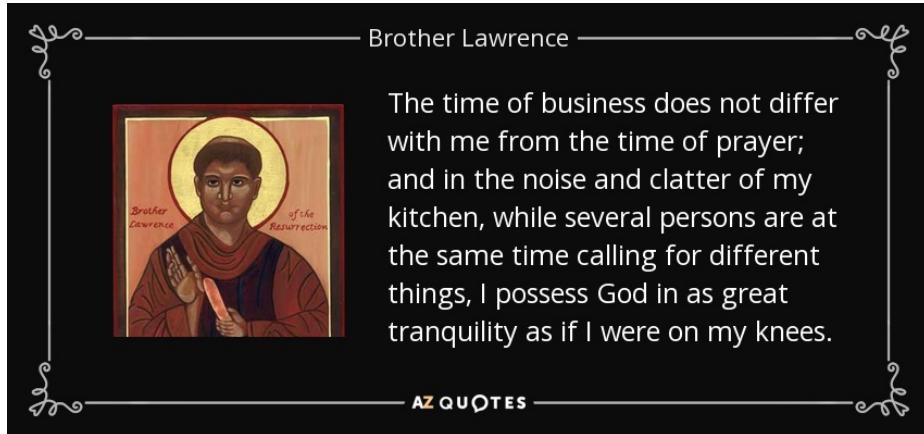
Many of us miss some of the things we did before lockdown. A restaurant meal with friends and family, perhaps. We long to be sitting around a table once again entertaining one another with our conversation. Yes, we've reached a modicum of unity in longing for many things.

In our earlier reading from The Acts of the Apostles we hear that Jesus was 'lifted up' and a cloud took him out of the disciples' sight'. This heavenly ascent of Jesus we call The Ascension. It was the Feast of the Ascension last Thursday and if you watched or heard the reflection by Revd. Paul you will have heard about the Ascension.

In our technological age it sometimes seems that anything is possible and the Ascension is certainly something extra-ordinary. It has to be said that nothing about Jesus was ordinary. We're always taken by surprise when he turns things on their heads, shows up the hypocritical and admires the lowly and humble. In this case we're called upon to bring our faith to bear on this extraordinary happening. The Ascension narratives in the Acts of the Apostles makes clear that Jesus's post-resurrection appearances have come to an end. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit in his place to give power to his followers in order to be his witnesses.

In that reading from Acts we're told that the disciples 'constantly devoted themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus as well as his brothers'. They clearly felt prayer was worthwhile. If we engage in prayer at all we're responding to a call to meet, as they did, with an Eternal Presence which Christians believe is ultimately in control, and helps us to be confident that whatever the circumstances, we are not alone.

I was reading about Brother Lawrence the 17th century Lay Brother who entered a monastery in Paris. His work 'The Practice of the Presence of God' speaks of a God who is always present and with whom we can be in touch. Here is a quote:



Brother Lawrence was assigned to the monastery kitchen and spent 40 years working there. Among the pots and pans he learned to experience the peace and constant presence of God. Many of us have had to get to know our kitchens all over again. To re-connect with our cooking skills, if we ever had any, and to find **contentment** in the everyday household demands upon us. But here are opportunities to exercise our creative energy. When I manage a recipe successfully, just a small step, I feel very hopeful.

Like the returning spring, there are always signs of hope. Hope at this time when we see some reduction in fatalities around parts of the world, hope when we hear of new births and hope when targets for virus testing are met. Hope, I find also, when I see the two blackbirds in my garden taking it in turns to splash around in the bird-bath and hopping on the soft ground finding food, in spite of the fear, clearly evident, as a magpie comes near.

At the start I asked, 'How are you with prayer?' and now I want to conclude with one by the 9th century Alcuin of York, an English clergyman, poet and teacher, whose feast day fell on Wednesday last:

Eternal light, shine into our hearts
Eternal goodness, deliver us from evil
Eternal power, be our support
Eternal wisdom, scatter the darkness of our ignorance
Eternal pity, have mercy upon us
That with all our heart and mind and soul and strength

We may seek your face and be brought by your infinite mercy
To your holy presence
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Perhaps you would find it helpful to pray this prayer in the coming week, while bearing in mind the current pandemic. Amen.

Introduction to the Peace

Jesus says
Peace is my parting gift to you,
My own peace, such as the world cannot give.
Trust in God always; trust also in me.

The peace of the Lord be always with you
And also with you

Blessing

Christ our exalted King
pour upon you his abundant gifts
and bring you to reign with him in glory.
And the blessing ...

Final hymn – Father hear the prayer we offer

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength, that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.

Not forever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our Guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Saviour, be thou at our side.