



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

18th OCTOBER 2020

TRINITY 19

<u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u>	PARISH OFFICE: Monday & Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am TEL:01252 331161: e- mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk
Isaiah 45 v 1 - 7	
1 Thessalonians 1 v 1 - 10	
Matthew 22 v 15 - 22	



'Give to the Emperor the things that are the Emperors, and to God the things that are God's'

COLLECT FOR TRINITY 19

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you; mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THIS WEEK

WEDNESDAY HOLY COMMUNION 9 – 30 am

CARE AND SHARE

Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need. The shelves are usually being emptied each day. If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. please bring it to church with you or leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING

This meeting, postponed from April, is TODAY in church after our service of Family Communion at 10 am. We hope to be finished by 11 – 15 am.

Nomination forms are in the middle of church for 4 PCC members, and two places on Deanery Synod.

DON'T FORGET TO PUT YOUR CLOCK BACK ONE HOUR NEXT WEEKEND

SHOEBOX APPEAL

Shoebox time is here again! There are some ready to fold boxes and leaflets at the back of the church. NO toothpaste, sweets or 4 suit cards please, BUT homemade stuffed toys are allowed if stuffed with proper toy stuffing. Boxes can be made on line for £20, which includes the 'postage' and you can choose items from a limited list. There will be a box for donations in church but no big packing party this year, unless the rules change. Thank You. Barbara Rose

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BOXES & CHRISTMAS CARDS

Because banking is more difficult this year, if it is at all possible, please count the money in your box yourself, then give me a cheque – made out to The Children's Society. I will give you a receipt in the form of a new label to seal your box for next year. Thank you for your help.

I am selling Christmas cards again this year. Please pick up or ask Mary for an order form for The Children's Society Christmas cards which may be seen on their website. As this contains some other cards, please only order from the 26 cards on the list. I have just a few catalogues for viewing if you have no internet. Please pay cash with your order or cheques made out to Mary Lamont. Thank you.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – LAST AFTER TRINITY

Leviticus 19 v 1 – 2, 15 – 18; 1 Thessalonians 2 v 1 – 8; Matthew 22 v 34 - end

Congratulations and good wishes to everyone celebrating their birthday this week: DOREEN JONES & CHRSTINE PIPER (20TH); JAMES HURST (22ND)

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

WYN LONG; RICHARD STOKES; EDNA PEARSON; JUNE MIDDLETON; LIAM MURPHY;

JULIE QUANTRILL - who contributed so much to the life of St Peter's over many years before the family's move to Scotland. We give thanks for the gifts and talents that she shared with us. Please pray for her and for Pete, Jamie and Ailsa and all of her family at this sad and difficult time for them. Rest eternal grant to her O Lord. Amen.

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

THOUGHTS FROM THE RECTOR AT THE ANNUAL MEETING – OCTOBER 18TH 2020

As always, I enjoyed reading the reports of our activities at St Peter's in 2019 and earlier this year. Thank you to everyone who gives so generously of their time, talents and money to help make St Peter's the friendly worshipping community that it is. A special thank you to Carol for all that she gives to the parish, and also to Mary for her continuing support, especially in the services and in music. We have also been very fortunate in having such hard working and conscientious Churchwardens to keep our buildings well cared for and to ensure that we have been able to re-open safely, adhering to the plethora of changing Covid regulations. As Charles prepares to stand down, I would particularly like to acknowledge his dedication and enthusiasm in supporting St Peter's in this role – and also Tricia's support and her patience with the amount of time he has given to St Peter's over the years.

We have faced a great many challenges over the past months to our familiar pattern of life as a church community. The fall of plaster over the south door, just in time for Christmas last year, was just a foretaste of things to come, as it turned out! The months of lockdown were unprecedented for church life, and it was particularly difficult for all of us not being able to celebrate the 'feast of feasts' – Easter, together in church. Even in wartime that has never happened before. Ongoing anxiety and feelings of isolation have been especially painful, and, personally, I have found it very difficult not being able to visit those most at risk at home, to take them the sacrament and give them reassurance in person. I am grateful, though, to all who kept in contact with others by phone and social media during that time, and continue to offer support as best they can.

Some churches were quick to set up worship online, whereas, we are still taking our first tentative steps in that direction. However, I hope that the written services on the website, which we could share at 10 am on Sunday mornings, went some way to help us feel still part of a worshipping community. We were, though, one of the first churches in the area to reopen our doors back in July. In the future, online worship will have an exciting part to play in church life, but, in my view, it should never be seen as a replacement for services where people can actually gather together in one place to worship the Lord. As a church that is centred on the Eucharist, as Jesus intended it to be, whatever is 'virtual' can only ever supplement not supplant what has been handed down to us from the days of the Apostles themselves. Jesus' words 'Do this in remembrance of me' can never, in my view, become 'watch this in remembrance of me', if we are to be true to the Gospel message.

In that connection I would just like to mention something that took place last weekend in Assisi. In the Church of St Francis, a teenager called Carlo Acutis was recognised by the Church as being 'Blessed' – one step from sainthood. He died of Leukemia in 2006 aged only 15, but in his short life became an inspiration to many, particularly young people like himself. He was well versed in modern technology, a bit of a computer genius in fact, which he used to help spread the Gospel online, and he has already been dubbed 'the patron saint of the internet'. Alongside that, though, he had a particular devotion to meeting Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which he received every day. One of the things he said, which I think is very pertinent to us all, as we try to balance 'virtual church' with 'traditional church' in future, is this: *'The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on earth we will have a foretaste of heaven'* and *'By standing*

before the Eucharistic Christ, we become holy'. Something to think and pray about as we move forward into the 'new normal' and seek the best ways to take Jesus' message to people of all ages today, both online and in person.

Our last Sunday together, before lockdown, was our Vision Sunday in St Peter's Centre. Together we looked at the 12 Diocesan 'Transforming Church, Transforming Lives' goals, and people came up with lots of good suggestions for moving forward as a parish. Although progress has been slowed the pandemic, it is important that we don't lose sight of what came out of that Sunday, and, indeed, the PCC has kept it on its' agenda. Looking to the future we said that we'll make meaningful contact with those moving in to the many new homes in the parish, we'll build on the success of things like 'Tots 'n' Toast' and our Family Worship to reach out to young families. We'll improve our communications, develop our website, Facebook page and develop other social media platforms. We'll find more opportunities to study the Scriptures and pray together and aim to be bolder in trying new forms of worship for different groups. Our recent Care and Share initiative has highlighted a particular need for practical support in our local area, and there will be more ways of reaching out in practical ways, I'm sure, if we allow ourselves to be led by God in new directions. Importantly, we will continue to pray for Christian Sisters and Brothers who are being persecuted around the world, continue to support various charities – old and new. We'll look again look at how we can take positive steps in the face of the climate crisis and improve our Green credentials. Also, we can start looking again at how we can share talents and resources with our friends at St Mary's, St Paul's and Holy Angels.

Finally, I was sorry not to have been able to have a celebration with all of you, for the 30th anniversary of my ordination to the Priesthood back in June. Our plans for celebrating the 20th anniversary of our Centre also had to be cancelled. But, in the end what is really important is the present and the future, and those things are really best celebrated by carrying on the work that was begun back then.

I know that, over the past difficult months, we have done a great deal to support each other and our neighbours and friends in Ash, and I know that we will all carry on doing that as best we can. With God's help we will face the next few difficult months together and not let this terrible disease prevent us from continuing the work that God has given us all to do. We know that Jesus is with us always, and that we can rely on his help and guidance in building the Kingdom to God's glory.

With every blessing

Fr Keith



Jesus said: 'Do this in remembrance of me'

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

- 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul, ♦
and all that is within me bless his holy name.
- 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, ♦
and forget not all his benefits;
- 3 Who forgives all your sins ♦
and heals all your infirmities;
- 4 Who redeems your life from the Pit ♦
and crowns you with faithful love and compassion;
- 5 Who satisfies you with good things, ♦
so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.
- 6 The Lord executes righteousness ♦
and judgement for all who are oppressed.
- 7 He made his ways known to Moses ♦
and his works to the children of Israel.
- 8 The Lord has established his throne in heaven, ♦
and his kingdom has dominion over all.
- 9 Bless the Lord, you angels of his, ♦
you mighty ones who do his bidding
and hearken to the voice of his word.
- 10 Bless the Lord, all you his hosts, ♦
you ministers of his who do his will.
- 11 Bless the Lord, all you works of his,
in all places of his dominion; ♦
bless the Lord, O my soul.

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.

This hymn is said or sung:

Ye servants of God,
your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad
his wonderful Name;
the Name all-victorious
of Jesus extol:
his kingdom is glorious;
he rules over all.

God ruleth on high,
almighty to save;
and still he is nigh:
his presence we have.
The great congregation
his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation
to Jesus our King.

Salvation to God
who sits on the throne!
Let all cry aloud,
and honour the Son.
The praises of Jesus
the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces,
and worship the Lamb.

Then let us adore,
and give him his right:
All glory and power,
all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing,
with angels above,
and thanks never ceasing
and infinite love.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Let us call to mind our sins and confess them to Almighty God:

All Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have wandered and strayed from your ways like lost sheep.
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.
We have offended against your holy laws.
We have left undone those things that we ought to have done;
and we have done those things that we ought not to have done;
and there is no health in us.
But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us sinners.
Spare those who confess their faults.
Restore those who are penitent,
according to your promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may live a disciplined, righteous and godly life, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

All now say 'The Gloria':

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his 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.

We now say the collect for Trinity 19 (see first page)

Read Isaiah 45 v 1 – 7 followed by Psalm 96 v 1- 9 concluding with:

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.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1 v 1 – 10

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

You have the words of eternal life.

All: Alleluia

Now read Matthew 22 v 1 – 14. Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Fr Keith:

The authorities still hadn't got it! In today's Gospel story we see them trying to catch Jesus out, yet again, but of course it is impossible to do that. The question 'tell us, is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?' was meant to be a clever way of putting Jesus in an impossible position. The reference to the 'law' here, is, of course the law of the Roman occupiers, who expected all of their conquered peoples to help fill the imperial coffers. This was not very popular with the Jewish people, as you would expect. So, if Jesus answered 'yes' to their question he would be less popular with his own people. But, if he answered 'no' he would be putting himself at odds with the might of Rome – the people who had the military muscle to ensure they got what they wanted.

Jesus' answer is clever and straightforward – 'give back to the emperor the things that are his'. In saying this, Jesus is proving that he is not a revolutionary with a political agenda. Jesus' ministry wasn't about inciting civil disobedience, like withholding taxes or organising armed rebellion, to rid the Jewish people of their Roman oppressors. There is plenty of evidence in the Gospels that there were some people who thought he should do that – possibly even Judas Iscariot. But, no, that was never the purpose of Jesus' ministry. The Kingdom that Jesus kept speaking about was the Kingdom of God not a political one. Jesus came to get people back on the right road with God, hence the second part of His answer – 'give to God the things that are God's.' Those 'things' are not about money, but about the whole way you should be living your life in accordance with God's will. That was something those who had asked the question were *not* doing in Jesus' eyes, even though they thought they were.

Down the centuries Christians have often wrestled with the question of what their relationship with civil authorities should be. Sometimes it hasn't seemed quite as easy to separate our duties to 'the emperor' and to 'God' as this Gospel story would seem to suggest. What should Christians do when they find themselves living under the rule of oppression, persecution and terror? Is it enough just to put up with it and keep silent while those around you are suffering as a result? It has been argued at times that it is perfectly legitimate to rebel and not carry on paying the emperor. So, was Jesus saying that Christians should never get involved in revolutions or uprisings? That oppression should never be fought against? From other things he said about loving your enemies, praying for those who persecute you, and turning the other cheek – there would seem to be a good argument to support that view. But, I think that we have to be careful about being selective with the texts we look at in this context.

Undoubtedly Jesus, Himself, showed little liking for violence towards others. He quickly heals the ear that is cut off by an over enthusiastic Peter when Jesus was arrested. That's not to say, however, that Jesus wasn't in favour of radical change – but change that comes about when people start thinking like God, whose ways are not the same as fallen human ways.

Giving to God the things that are God's, means our time and the worship that is His due. By doing that we will open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit to be transformed into the people God always wanted us to be. Love rather

than hate will become our pattern of life. Violence and oppression will give way to care and support of others, and evil will be defeated not by more evil, but by doing good.

Now, clearly, this is a counter – cultural path to follow. The usual human response to oppression is to fight back, but Jesus is trying to steer us here to a different way. Many people might see that as a cop-out, and there have certainly been situations in which more physically forceful action has been necessary in the face of particular evil. In the long term, though, the Jesus way is to establish a better way of living in which love is always our guide. This is God's way not the human way of course.

So, this Gospel story isn't just about Jesus getting Himself out of a tricky situation with a clever answer. Rather, it should get us thinking about whether we are giving to God the things that are His and what that means about how we live our lives. How much do we actually desire to live in God's way, so that we can help transform the world for good? Making time to spend in God's presence should be our priority. Those who are living under oppression today will be best helped when enough good people work together, no longer remain silent and demonstrate by their actions that there is indeed a better more loving way than tyranny and evil. Jesus' message is always one of hope for a better future and we can all play our part in helping to bring that about by actually giving to God what is His.

Now pause for your own reflections.

(L): We affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:

All We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came
down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit
and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge
the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

We now say together:

- All* In your tender compassion, O God,
the dawn from on high shall break upon us.
- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
 - 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
 - 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
 - 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
 - 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
 - 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
 - 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
 - 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
 - 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
 - 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

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.

All In your tender compassion, O God,
the dawn from on high shall break upon us.

Our prayers, today, are written by Fr Keith:

Loving God, help us to make good use of the time you have given us, to do good in order to defeat evil. Strengthen your whole church in the power of the Spirit to go out into the world with joy, reflecting your light in the places of darkness and fear. Be with the leaders of your church to guide them, especially our Bishops Andrew and Jo, may they make right decisions and inspire all of us to stay faithful and make a real difference to the lives of those who live around us.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Loving God, as the Pandemic worsens, inspire world leaders to work together for the common good. Be with all those who are risking their own lives to help others, give them strength and give them courage. Help us all to avoid being selfish at this difficult time so that what we do does not endanger others. Guide the work of those who are trying to develop a vaccine, may their efforts soon make a real difference and save lives.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Loving God, we ask your blessing on our Annual Parish Meeting this morning. We give thanks for all who continue to serve on our PCC and on those about to stand down. We also ask you to be with all who are elected today. As we seek to do your will in this parish, we pray that you will show us how best to use the many gifts and talents that you have given us. Keep us prayerful, loving, forgiving and compassionate, and inspire us anew to set an example to others and reach out to them in your name.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for healing and strength for all who are sick and suffering at this time, at home, in hospital or in care. Be with them, that they may know they are enfolded in your love, and that you will never leave them. Help those who care for them not to lose heart, may they know within them the strength of the Spirit, that the skills you have given them may carry on bringing relief and comfort.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Loving God, we thank you that on the first Easter Day, your Son defeated sin and death for ever. Help us to trust in the power of the resurrection and the promise of eternal life given freely to all who put their trust in Him.

We remember those who we have known and loved but see no longer here on earth, and we pray for the repose of their souls, in particular all who have died recently, among them: WYN LONG; RICHARD STOKES; EDNA PEARSON; JUNE MIDDLETON; LIAM MURPHY; and JULIE QUANTRILL. May those who grieve for them take comfort in your unfailing love and know the inner peace and assurance that only you can give.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Loving God, we ask that our prayers may be joined with Mary, Peter, Luke and all the saints as we commend ourselves and each other to your unfailing love, saying:

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

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

O Lord, all the world belongs to You
and You are always making all things new.
What is wrong, You forgive,
and the new life You give
is what's turning the world upside down.

The world's only loving to its friends,
but Your way of loving never ends,
loving enemies too;
and this loving with You
is what's turning the world upside down.

The world lives divided and apart,
You draw men together, and we start
in our friendship to see
that in harmony we
can be turning the world upside down.

The world wants the wealth to live in state,
but You show us a new way to be great:
like a servant You came,
and if we do the same,
we'll be turning the world upside down.

O Lord, all the world belongs to You
and You are always making all things new.
send your Spirit on all
in your church whom you call
to be turning the world upside down.

Let us pray:

Faithful Lord,
whose steadfast love never ceases
and whose mercies never come to an end:
grant us the grace to trust you
and to receive the gifts of your love,
new every morning,
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eternal God and Father,
you create and redeem us by the power of your love:
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves in love and service
to one another and to you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of
God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and
all who we love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

A lamp or candle may be lit.

- 1 I love you, O Lord my strength. ♦
The Lord is my crag, my fortress and my deliverer.
- 2 In my distress I called upon the Lord ♦
and cried out to my God for help.
- 3 He heard my voice in his temple ♦
and my cry came to his ears.
- 4 He parted the heavens and came down ♦
and thick darkness was under his feet.
- 5 He rode upon the cherubim and flew; ♦
he came flying on the wings of the wind.
- 6 He made darkness his covering round about him, ♦
dark waters and thick clouds his pavilion.
- 7 From the brightness of his presence,
through the clouds ♦
burst hailstones and coals of fire.
- 8 The Lord also thundered out of heaven; ♦
the Most High uttered his voice
with hailstones and coals of fire.
- 9 For you will save a lowly people ♦
and bring down the high looks of the proud.
- 10 You also shall light my candle; ♦
the Lord my God shall make my darkness to be
bright.

11 As for God, his way is perfect;
the word of the Lord is tried in the fire; ♦
he is a shield to all who trust in him.

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.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon (St Luke) 103; Tue 107; Wed 119 v
129 - 152; Thurs 116; Fri 130; Sat 118 ending with:*

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.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All Rejoice and be glad
for you are the light of the world,
and great is your reward in heaven.

- 1 Blessed are the poor in spirit, ♦
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 2 Blessed are those who mourn, ♦
for they shall be comforted.
- 3 Blessed are the meek, ♦
for they shall inherit the earth.
- 4 Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst after righteousness, ♦
for they shall be satisfied.
- 5 Blessed are the merciful, ♦
for they shall obtain mercy.
- 6 Blessed are the pure in heart, ♦
for they shall see God.
- 7 Blessed are the peacemakers, ♦
for they shall be called children of God.
- 8 Blessed are those who suffer persecution
for righteousness' sake, ♦
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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.

All Rejoice and be glad
for you are the light of the world,
and great is your reward in heaven.

Readings:

Monday (St Luke) Isaiah 61 v 1 – 6 ; Colossians 4 v 7 - end
Tuesday 2 Chronicles 28; John 13 v 12 - 20
Wednesday: 2 Chr. 29 v 1 - 19; John 13 v 21 - 30
Thursday: 2 Chron. 29 v 20 - end; John 13 v 31 - end
Friday: 2 Chron. 30; John 14 v 1 - 14
Saturday: 2 Chronicles 32 v 1 - 22; John 14 v 15 - end

Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All Remember your promise of mercy,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

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.

All Remember your promise of mercy,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

(On Monday, St Luke's Day, this special collect:

*Almighty God,
you called Luke the physician,
whose praise is in the gospel,
to be an evangelist and physician of the soul:
by the grace of the Spirit
and through the wholesome medicine of the gospel,
give your Church the same love and power to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.)*

This hymn may be said or sung:

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me feel Thee near me;
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear Thee speaking,
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
Oh, speak to reassure me,
To hasten, or control;
Oh, speak, and make me listen,
Thou Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
To all who follow Thee
That where Thou art in glory
There shall Thy servant be;
And Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Oh, give me grace to follow,
My Master and my Friend.

Oh, let me see Thy footmarks,
And in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly
Is in Thy strength alone.
Oh, guide me, call me, draw me,
Uphold me to the end;
And then to rest receive me,
My Saviour and my Friend.

Let us pray:

Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

SERMON FROM THE DIOCESE

Render to Caesar

Bishop Andrew's Sermon, 18.10.20,

Matthew 22 15-22, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

It was an amazing occasion, and a real privilege to be there: the 70th anniversary of the birth of the Church of South India. Up until three days before, I didn't know whether I'd be able to travel: my passport, stamped with the relevant visa, only arrived at the very last minute. But now the organisers knew that I was coming, as the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, I was duly asked to preach at the main event, with a rather alarmingly short time in which to prepare.

Chennai Cathedral is built on the model of a church that Bishop Jo knows very well – St. Martin-in-the-Fields in central London. Thousands of people had converged on it for a weekend of celebrations. And blessedly the sermon went well, and the event was a joyous one. But the real challenge came when the service was ended, and I was approached by a journalist from the Times of India.

So was I enjoying my stay in Chennai?, was his apparently innocent starter for 10. Well yes, I replied, I was enjoying it very much. So what were you preaching about in the service?, he continued. I was preaching about Jesus' prayer that we might all be one. So what did I have to say about corruption in the Church of South India?

Well, I'd done enough media training to recognise quite such an obvious booby trap when I saw it. 'I'm not here to talk about that', I responded, and kept firmly off the subject for the rest of the interview. But even my non-answers provided enough material, it seemed, for the journalist to print a story which appeared on the front page the following day: 'Bishop of Guildford, the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative, refuses to deny that there is corruption in the Church of South India': just a reflection, perhaps, of the increasing hostility towards the churches in the India of today.

'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' Now that was certainly a booby trap and a half. When Jesus was just a young boy, a man called Judas the Galilean had led a revolt against Rome, and this question, 'Should we pay taxes to Caesar?' lay right at the heart of their revolutionary agenda. The Romans had brutally crushed Judas and his men – the young Jesus would have seen some of them nailed to crosses, which were scattered throughout the Galilean countryside. So putting a foot wrong in

response to *this* question wouldn't just result in embarrassment and a hasty retraction from the Church of South India's Communications Team. It could result in death.

But there was another side to the story, of course: because while you and I live in a democracy, where paying taxes provides for Universal Education and the National Health Service and the Police Force and the Army and certain basic benefits for those who've fallen on hard times, Jesus and his contemporaries lived under occupation, with *their* taxes paying for the very soldiers who had invaded their land in the first place. What kind of credibility would Jesus have, then, among his own people – what kind of Messiah would he be – were he simply to tell them to roll over, to do everything the Romans asked of them like good little boys and girls? You can almost imagine Jesus' hostile interviewers, the Pharisees and Herodians, purring with delight when they came up with that one!

So how would Jesus respond, sensing their malice, and caught as he was between the devil and the deep blue sea? Well, first he asked for a denarius, a Roman coin that contained not only the image of Caesar on it but also some writing blasphemously proclaiming the Emperor as High Priest and Son of God. Next he asked a question of his own, a very simple one: 'Whose image is this, and whose inscription?' And then the famous response, 'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'.

So did that mean that Jesus was telling his listeners to pay tax to Rome? Yes, it did. Jesus wasn't leading some revolutionary anti-tax campaign like Judas the Galilean before him. So did that mean instead that Jesus was playing it safe, was advocating just rolling over and opting for the quiet life? No, it didn't. Within just a few days of this incident, after all, he would be nailed to a Roman cross just as securely as was Judas the Galilean before him.

It's rather that Jesus was speaking of a new kind of revolution, a peaceful revolution likened to the impact of salt and light and yeast and the kingdom of God growing like a tiny mustard seed; it's rather he was speaking of changed hearts and changed lives, and the values of faith and hope and love – the kind of thing we read about in our epistle reading today, where the Christian church in Thessalonica had turned away from idols to serve the true and living God.

In this revolution, Christians would aim to be the best possible citizens of whatever country they inhabited. They would live honestly, they would pay their taxes graciously, they would reach out to the poorest in

society with generosity and compassion, they would contribute to the common good.

And yet, in this revolution too Christians would recognise that first and foremost they were citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, loving the Lord their God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, and doing all they could to pray and work for the coming of God's Kingdom. And only if the State asked too much of them: only if the State commanded them to render under Caesar what belonged to God: to worship the Emperor, say, or to *stop* worshipping the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – would civil disobedience become the only option – though always civil disobedience of a *peaceful* kind.

The great Tertullian, whose life spanned parts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, wrote a defence of the early church against its Roman detractors, where he put it like this:

'We are a body knit together by one faith, one discipline and one hope. We meet together as a congregation, uniting together to offer prayer to God. We pray for the emperor and all in authority, for the welfare of the world, and for peace... We read our holy scriptures to nourish our faith, hope, steadfastness and good habits. We hear exhortations and rebukes...'

'Once a month, anyone who wants to, makes a small donation – but only he who is able and willing; there is no compulsion. It is not spent on feasts, but to support and bury poor people, to provide for orphans, the elderly, victims of shipwreck and those in prison for their faith.'

We're good citizens, Tertullian was arguing: 'good citizens of earth and good citizens of heaven' – even if his appeal largely fell on deaf ears.

And even today, as I learnt at first hand, there are Christians in India, who are facing an uncertain future in the face of a new and less tolerant strain of Hindu nationalism; and even today there are Christians who are refusing to renounce their faith at the hands of Boko Haram and other militant groups around the world; and even today, there are tens of millions of Christians worshipping in China in a kind of uneasy truce with the government – Christians who have quietly refused to bow the knee to the Communist Regime where their dual citizenships have come into conflict with one another. And these same Christians are generally living lives that are both honourable and honest; and when brought before the authorities they make much the same defence that Tertullian made. But ultimately there is a

line to be drawn, where Caesar claims what belongs to God alone.

Friends, such conflicts exist in our society too, though generally in a far less costly form. But as we continue to press on through this Covid crisis – and as we recognise more and more the inequalities in our society that Covid has both revealed and exacerbated – it seems to me there's a special calling on us Christians to be the best possible citizens of both our nation and the Kingdom of Heaven.

For one thing, let's talk tax – rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's - not least because our gospel reading is all about tax. For while tax generally gets a bad name, and political parties do all they can to reassure us that their manifestos won't adversely affect our spending powers, the truth is that a good and fair tax system is the fruit of a society founded on Christian principles of compassion, justice, solidarity and generosity: the wealthy quite rightly paying a larger proportion of their wealth to enable others simply to stand on their feet. To coin a phrase, *'God loves a cheerful tax payer'*!

And for another thing, let's talk tithing: rendering to God what is God's - not least because we're in the middle of the Generous October campaign here in the diocese, and the finances of some of our churches and our Christian charities are really stretched. This time of Covid has brought out the generosity of many of God's people – not least in my parish here and its neighbour St John's, whose initiative *Stoke Community Support* has delivered more than 16,000 meals to some of the most vulnerable families on our local estates. And that's the kind of generosity we need right now, the kind of thing that Tertullian was writing of all those years ago. And again if you're in a position to tithe more generously at this point, for the work of the church and the relief of the poor, could I please urge you to do so?

And so as I think back to my trip to Chennai in September 2017, and to that booby trap set by the Times of India journalist; and as I reflect on Jesus' response to the booby trap in our gospel reading today – so I would encourage us to think again of what it means to be a good citizen of the United Kingdom right now, and what it means to be a good citizen of the kingdom of Heaven. And as you keep going in your Christian journey, may people be able to say of you as St Paul said of the church in Thessalonica:

'We always thank God for all of you, remembering your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ'. Amen.