

## 2020 26<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY

Today I would like to reflect with you on our 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians. It is a Reading which for many years has been at the heart of my understanding of Jesus.

Jesus has existed from all eternity as a unique Person. He is part of the Godhead- one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in a unity of Being. As God He is all-powerful, all-present and all-knowing. As St Paul said: "His state was divine. He enjoyed equality with the Father and the Holy Spirit."

The creation of the Universe was an action of the whole Trinity. It is sometimes said that the Father planned the Universe in all its complexity. Jesus, God's Word, proclaimed, 'Let it be' and it came into existence and the Holy Spirit has worked within creation helping it to evolve, bringing it, century after century into the wonder of its being.

The climax of God's Creation on Earth was the creation of humankind. We who are human are unique because we alone have the ability to reflect on the wonder of the creation, to see that behind everything is our all-loving God, and to react to God's great goodness with thanksgiving. If we are to be true to ourselves we need to acknowledge that there is a Creator, that we are mere creations- and that for Creation to be in harmony with itself, the Creator must be given due honour and obedience. Anything else leads to chaos.

But as we learnt in the Book of Genesis, right from the beginning we, the human race, have chosen to ignore the Creator's right to be worshipped and obeyed. We who are mere Creations have put ourselves at the centre of the Universe and worshipped wealth, power and fame.

God, rather than giving up on humankind and allowing us to self-destruct, reached out to us in a spectacular way. In the Incarnation, in the birth of Jesus, God came to live within humanity and to bring healing.

The Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God, in an act of radical love, emptied Himself of all the qualities of being God to become fully human. While His essential identity remained as the Word of God, during the 33 years when He lived as a man on Earth, Jesus forewent all the powers belonging to Himself as the Word of God.

Which meant that for those years on Earth Jesus was no longer all-present. From the moment Mary said 'Yes' to being His Mother, the Word was

made flesh and dwelt among us. From that moment, Jesus no longer existed in heaven. He was no longer all-present.

Likewise, for His time on Earth, Jesus was not all-knowing. As a boy, He had to learn the Bible from St Joseph and Mary. He learnt what it meant to be the Messiah by questioning the elders of the Temple when He was 12 years old and after His Baptism He spent 40 days out in the desert deep in reflection and prayer, pondering on the mission the Father had called Him to initiate. He did nothing important during His days of ministry without first asking for guidance from the Father in prayer.

It is clear, too, that Jesus was not all-powerful. During the days of His earthly ministry, Jesus worked His miracles through the power of the Father. This is shown marvellously in St John's detailed description of Jesus' greatest miracle- the raising of Lazarus. As Jesus beholds Lazarus' open tomb, St John writes: "And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank You for having heard me. I know that You always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that You have sent me. And with a loud voice Jesus called out, 'Lazarus come forward.'"

In Jesus God became as we are. He suffered as we suffer. He died as we will die. It is a huge thought.

Last Wednesday we celebrated the Feast of St. Padre Pio. As a young priest in the early 1900's, Padre Pio was appalled by the thought that God should have suffered on the Cross for humankind and begged God to give him, Pio, a share in Jesus' suffering. And for 50 years the saintly Padre bore the stigmata- the wounds of Jesus- in his body. The wounds caused him intense pain. Almost literally, Padre Pio suffered on the Cross with His God, Jesus- sharing in Jesus' work of redemption.

In our Churches we have the crucifix as a central focus likewise reminding us that at Mass we are called to be on Calvary with the Lord and to bond ourselves with Him, sharing in Jesus' work of redemption.

After Jesus had died on the Cross, He descended into the place called 'Hades'- joining all the dead from the time of Adam and Eve- and waited alongside them for the Father to accept His sacrifice.

And then, marvellously, on the third day, the Father and the Holy Spirit acted. "And God raised Jesus on high and gave Him the name which is above all other names, so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the

underworld, should bend he knee at the Name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

On Easter Sunday, the Souls of the Just, joyously entered heaven and worshipped Jesus- the qualities of His Godhead restored- as the Eternal King.

Truly this is one of the most exalted Readings in all of the Scriptures.

And what of us?

Ted Richards, a writer in the latest ‘Tui Motu’ says: “We live in times which are filled with doubt, discordance, raging wild-fires, global pandemic, massive protest movements and controversial political leaders. How do we react to all of this?” He answers his own question: “Our best course of action is by embracing the course of self-emptying actions of sacrifice- undertaken together as a community.”

The Incarnation of Jesus and His death on the Cross was the “Self-emptying action of sacrifice” beyond all others. It is through our own ‘self-emptying actions of sacrifice’ that we make the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of justice, peace and joy, ever-more present in our world today.