

RENEWAL

Nicky Ing - 1st June 2003

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John V:9-13; John 17: 11b-19

Today is the last Sunday of the Easter season between Ascension Day ... which we celebrated on Thursday, and the Day of Pentecost next Sunday when we pray for the Spirit to come upon the Church.

The reading from Acts tells us of the choice of Matthias as the replacement for Judas, who had defected and betrayed Jesus, and killed himself as a result. Jesus had chosen twelve apostles to be the nucleus of the new Israel (the Church). Just as the Jews traced their roots back to the twelve sons of Jacob, so the community of Jesus followers is rooted in the twelve apostles... so this explains why it was so important for a substitute to be chosen for Judas. Of course we also know that in another way Peter had also betrayed Jesus, just before the crucifixion, by denying that he had ever known him at all. It is interesting to notice that Peter is sometimes called a 'stumbling saint'...that must be part of the reason that he is such a great consolation to us!

But, unlike Judas, Peter was willing to seek and accept forgiveness. Jesus had encouraged him to strengthen the other disciples. Now we see him doing this....Building a new team.

The second reading, from 1 John 5 reminds us that God has given us eternal life, and this life is to be found in Jesus Christ. John says very clearly: 'Whoever has the Son has life..... Whoever does not have the son of God does not have life'.... The life in Christ is the life of the Spirit of Jesus..... the Spirit keeps us in the life of God, and keeps the life of God in us...in spite of our own worst tendencies. That is very comforting.

In the Gospel we have part of Jesus' solemn prayer at the Last Supper. Here he prays for his disciples whom he is leaving behind to carry on his work. Just as Jesus was sent into the world by the Father, so the disciples are being sent into the world by Jesus. In his prayer for them, Jesus also prayed for us. It is important to notice what kind of things Jesus prayed for.

He prayed, firstly, that they would remain **faithful**. "Protect them in your name that you have given me'...hold them steady....notice that God takes the initiative in this. It was Mother Theresa who said once 'Our task is not to be successful... only to be faithful'. We may never see the long-term effects of our own limited faithfulness...but the call is to hold fast, be rooted in the truth of Jesus.

Secondly, Jesus prayed for **unity** among the believers. ‘so that they may be one, as you and I are one’. We need diversity in the Church...but disunity among disciples weakens our witness to the world. We need to be **united in Christ**...but of course tolerant and accepting of one another and our differences in culture and style...Christ cuts through all cultural divisions...but in our humanity we will always have diversity. Divisions and power struggles will always cause pain to the heart of God...Jesus has already just demonstrated servanthood in the washing of the feet of his disciples.

Thirdly, Jesus prayed that they might be **preserved, or sanctified, in the truth**... the truth here being that Jesus himself is the Revelation of the unseen God.

Finally, he prayed **that they might be victorious over evil**. ‘I do not ask you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one’. It is not only the evil from outside that they will encounter...but evil from within as well.....the critical and judgmental spirit...the desire for power, for control over others...in many other small ways and greater ways we can be bound, by our own sinful attitudes.... and not free in ourselves to offer others the love which God offers us. On a societal level, it is not difficult for us to notice the obvious works of evil in the world around us. Our local newspaper this week has told us a horrendous story of the sexual abuse of tiny children...possibly by a young person who is barely a teenager himself...and we have read, too, of corruption in the Provincial Health Department and the suicide tragedy associated with all of that...and many other stories which reveal the presence of ungodly behaviour . And the ongoing threat of terrorism, and power struggles between nations, is affecting the lives of millions of people. It will always be so...but it seems particularly rife in these recent times, and the media continually draws our attention to it all. .The SACLA 2 Conference which we are praying for daily at the present time, and which is coming up in July... will be addressing the problems of HIV and AIDS, Crime, Poverty and Unemployment, the breakdown in Family Life, Violence, Racism, and Sexism..all symptomatic of the moral breakdown of our society. Challenging such issues as these is an ongoing struggle...but within each of us there is **the spirit of Jesus, given to us at our baptism**, and a work of God which if we allow it to develop and grow, will move us out in what may seem small and insignificant ways....but each of us has the power to offer something, however small, which will help to change our world for the better. The coming of Christ to us is not confined to a single place or time in history....in his resurrection he offers us a new vision of what our world can be.... It is important that we develop a sense of the presence of Christ not only in the Church...but in all our human relationships, and our work, and in our environment....Our task is to show Christ to the world...because we are in the world, we can’t escape from that, none of us can!

Jesus prayed for **faithfulness.....unity.....truth..... and victory over evil**. He knew it was going to be tough....but he did not offer us a release from difficulty and suffering...he promised to give us strength to cope with it.

There is a very real temptation, I think, to build walls, in a figurative way, around ourselves for protection. To build boundaries around our families and our communities in an effort to guard those within and also to keep others out...walls which we erect because we are afraid....we want to protect that which we hold dear, and keep it safe....perhaps we need to be careful about the boundaries we put around our minds...those which cling to outmoded ideas, and limit our creativity, and prevent us from growing in freedom and in faith...in this fast changing world of ours we need to be open to understanding what is going on around us... in order that we may be discerning people of God.

We have the opportunity to be a force for tremendous good in the world...both in small and greater ways.

As we wait this week for the day of Pentecost... the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples...let us be open to God's infilling of the Holy Spirit, the enabler, the Comforter, the one who gives Life to each of us...and life to the Church, here, in our wider Parish of Umngeni, our Diocese, and the Churches in Africa and throughout the world. Let us remember those who suffer persecution in the name of Christ...that they may continue to persevere in courage....May we respond prayerfully and individually to God's invitation...to be used as instruments of Gods grace, and may our thoughts, words and actions this week encourage others to grow closer to Jesus, who loves us with such an amazing love.

Prayer for Renew..... applicable for us today as we wait for Pentecost:

‘Holy Father, make us holy

Holy Jesus, make us holy

Holy Spirit, make us holy

Holy God, make us whole’.

Amen.