

Ninth Sunday after Trinity

A HOLY PEOPLE

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.
We lift up our hearts in thanks and praise:
Glory to you, O God!

PRAISE

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we come before God asking him to cleanse our hearts that we may worship and follow him in Spirit and in truth. In a time of silence reflect on your life in the last week, asking God to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.

Then say:

You were sent to heal the contrite:
Father, have mercy.

You came to call sinners:
Christ, have mercy.

You plead for us at the right hand of the Father:
Holy Spirit, have mercy.

Almighty God have mercy upon me,
forgive me my sins,
and keep me in eternal life. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Gracious Father,
revive the Church in our day,
and make her strong, holy and faithful,
for your glory's sake
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

READINGS

Read: 1 Kings 19.9-18

Verses from Psalm 85

LORD, will you not restore again our life,
that your people may rejoice in you?

Let us see, O LORD, your mercy,
and grant us your salvation.

I will listen to what the LORD God will say,
for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful,
that they turn not again to folly.

Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that his glory will dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth are met together,
justice and peace have kissed each other.

Faithfulness shall spring from the earth,
and righteousness look down from heaven.

The LORD will indeed give all that is good,
and our earth shall yield its increase.

Justice will march before him,
and guide his steps in the way. Amen.

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, alleluia!
You word is truth, O Lord,
consecrate us in the truth.
Alleluia!

Read: MATTHEW 14.22-33

REFLECTION

You shall be holy, for I am holy.
(1 Peter 1.16)

Ein Gedi is on the western shore of the Dead Sea; people have lived there since before 3000 BC. Along the shores of the Dead Sea and all over the Middle East communities have come and gone. Each had its own way of life, its beliefs and traditions, which were passed down through the generations. Pilgrims visit the remains of two of them at Masada and Qumran – two communities very much concerned to preserve the truth; so much so that at Masada they chose to die rather than betray what they held to be sacred.

Communities are important; they keep alive the memories that make us what we are. Without them we should have no sense of what it means to be British, Jewish, Muslim or Christian. It is through a dialogue with our community that we establish our identity and discover who we are. The Jews who perished at Masada were part of a nation who knew themselves to be God's chosen people, and at their best they understood this calling not as a privilege, but as a responsibility. It was through the Holy Nation that God made his holy will and purpose known. They were his instruments and he bound himself to them through a Covenant: He was their God, they were his People. Jesus began his ministry by calling the twelve to be the nucleus of the new Israel, a new People, bound to God through a new Covenant, who would keep the faith alive and proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. To that community Jesus promised great things: 'In truth, in very truth I

tell you, he who has faith in me will do what I am doing; and he will do greater things still...’ (*John 14.12*) The People are what they are because God is what he is: ‘You shall be holy for I am holy.’

The faith and the community go hand in hand; you cannot bypass the Church. Michael Ramsay put it well:

To be a Christian does not mean being ‘on the side’ of Christianity, like one who supports a movement or approves of a cause. It means submission of the self to Christ, and the sharing in the life of his family.*

Sharing in the life of that family is seen most clearly in the celebration of the Eucharist, the family meal in which Christ is made known. This, too, is not something which Christians can bypass: ‘In very truth I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you can have no life in you.’ (*John 6.53*) The meal is deeply symbolic, as Victor de Waal explains:

The cup that is shared signifies the Christian’s participation in the New Covenant; the bread broken and distributed, his membership of the one body, the body which Jesus declared to be his own.*

That body was given for all people, not just for Jesus’ followers, and so the church comes together not just to celebrate and to keep the memory alive; it comes together in order to be sent. Jesus described it as salt for the earth and as light for the world. At its best the Church is a sign to the world of how men and women are meant to live: in unity with God and with one another. One of the things that the Church, and each individual Christian, is called to do to be that living sign is to listen to God, to let his word dwell in our hearts so that it shapes our life, both personally and as a community. It is a lesson that even the great prophets like Elijah had to learn. It wasn’t enough that he trounced the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and showed their god to be no god; to do the work that God had called him to do, he had to hear ‘the still, small voice of calm’. The Will of God is not to be discerned in tumult,

tempest, earthquake or fire, but in 'the sound of sheer silence'. After the contest Elijah had fled for his life, afraid of the wrath of King Ahab, but alone in the silence he heard the voice of God, and knew that, come what may, God was with him.

The same lesson was dramatised for the disciples when they saw Jesus walking to them across the lake. At the mercy of the wind and the waves, their fear for their lives was compounded when they saw what seemed like a ghost coming to them across the water. But in the midst of the tumult and the depths of their fear, Jesus speaks the word of calm, 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.' And when Peter's faith fails as he walks to Jesus, the Lord is there to sustain him, just as God sustained Elijah.

It takes time for fear to depart and for us to trust in the Lord, come what may. Submitting ourselves to Christ and sharing in the life of his family are part and parcel of deepening our trust. As we listen to God's word, take it to heart, and break bread together we provide space for the still small voice to be heard (one reason, I believe, why worship really must include a decent amount of silence). St Augustine saw the whole life of the Church as Eucharistic:

You are the Body of Christ, that is to say in you and through you the method and work of the incarnation must go forward. You are meant to incarnate in your lives the throne of your adoration. You are to be taken, consecrated, broken and distributed that you may be the means of grace and the vehicles of the eternal charity.*

That is what it means to be a holy people. That is what it means when we are dismissed to go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

* Michael Ramsay, *Introducing the Christian Faith* | Victor de Waal, *What is the Church?* | Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon 272*.

Pause and reflect.

RESPONSE

*Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by your name; you are mine.*

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you,
You will never sink beneath the waves.
Do not be afraid...

When the fire is burning all around you,
You will never be consumed by the flames.
Do not be afraid...

When the fear of loneliness is looming,
Then remember I am at your side.
Do not be afraid...

When you dwell in the exile of a stranger,
Remember you are precious in my eyes.
Do not be afraid...

You are mine, O my child; I am your father,
And I love you with a perfect love.
Do not be afraid...

PRAYERS

A time of free prayer and intercession. You might like to use this five-fold pattern:

For the Church

For the World

For family, friends, neighbours and the local community

For the sick and all in need, near and far

For those who have died

At the end:

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

CONCLUSION

Our Father...

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