

SERMON FOR ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY | 03.11.2019

Among the 'things to do' in Mauritius, one of my choices was to visit the Anglican Cathedral in the capital, Port Louis – not least because it is dedicated to St James. The web site hadn't told us too much about it and indeed we had had to work quite hard to find a Mass anywhere on the island in English as most of the locals are French speaking.

Anyway, long story short, we negotiated the desperate traffic in Port Louis and even found somewhere to park, another small miracle. We had arrived at the Cathedral and there the white spire stood tall among the palm trees.

But the building was shut. And the tiny notice on the door said it was closed for repairs. Standing back from the portico we soon saw the evidence: damp everywhere, plants growing out of the stonework, deep staining from corroded metal and an all-pervading sense of despair. A short conversation with one of the congregation who was making a drink for herself and a couple of other friends at the back of the nearby Cathedral Hall revealed that the Cathedral had already been shut for three years and while the target was to open in two year's time, she didn't think the money was likely to come in to enable that to happen, any time soon.

Once home, we then did some investigative work and found a short appeal video on You Tube, made by the Dean. It showed pictures of the Cathedral interior which were, if anything, even more depressing. But then the tenor of the subtitles suddenly hit me: *Would we, said the Dean, be prepared to help them raise the millions of rupees that were required so that 'those who came after us would realise that we had not overlooked our responsibility to maintain the Cathedral, or walked away from the major task of restoring it?' Was I hearing right?*

Watching BBC World (the only TV channel available in English apart from CNN) has at least kept us up to speed with the political developments. We didn't have the A list of presenters necessarily but we did have political interviews and of course the scenes from the House of Commons during the various votes.

And even five thousand miles away it was hard not to see the endless somersaults and the playing with words in the House of Commons and elsewhere as anything more than a naked attempt to retain or to get power.

The constant changing of position and the apparent abandonment of those red lines which had seemed so intractable only a matter of days ago, made me ask, along with Pontius Pilate: *what is truth?* Now, in line with convention I will not refer to the election again until Polling Day but I don't think I am the only one entering these elections with a heavy heart.

The wonderful joie de vivre in St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (of whom he was particularly fond) speaks directly about motivation: in this passage he is celebrating the fact that what we are to look forward to has already been prepared for us by God - the reward for those who have already pledged themselves to serve him to the very best of their ability. It is not about personal power nor the ability of some to get to the top of the pile: it is all about how, through faith and trust in God, his glorious inheritance will be rolled out. *I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know what is the hope to which he has called you.* In that little video had the Dean begun to lose confidence in those hopes?

Strangely my spirits were somewhat restored by Jacob Rees Mogg's rather gracious speech of thanks to the retiring Speaker of the House of Commons! Jacob quoted John Bercow's original pitch for the role of Speaker, ten years ago, in which he said he didn't want to be remembered as the person who had done the Speaker's role but as *the facilitator of the changes that needed to be made.* Now whether he has achieved that I couldn't possibly say but John's Bercow's aim, it seems to me, was exactly in line with St Paul. *It isn't you that matters, it is the way you reveal and make possible what God already has in mind, what God is already doing.* We don't give to the restoration of the Cathedral (or to any other good cause) because of what people will think of us but because we believe – through his wisdom and revelation – that we have an insight into what God wants and requires of us.

And that makes us humble and it makes us want to work together so that we don't miss any of the insights that other people can share with us: *the immeasurable greatness of his power given to those who believe as St Paul expresses it.*

And somehow that needs to spill down to the very smallest things we do as a Christian community: one of the really important things that visiting other churches on holiday provides is a good wake-up call about small things, small mechanical things.

So there we were, Maria and I, among the very small congregation of St Simon's, meeting – for want of anywhere of their own - in the library of the local Roman Catholic Church, about an hour away from where we were staying. No one greeted us at the beginning; and when there were cups of tea at the end no one came and said hello. We had had to find our own service books from the various options available near the door and there had been no formal welcome from the priest either.

So what does that remind me to do better, now we are back? How can we make these words from Ephesians live: *God has put his power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in the heavenly places, far above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.*

And the answer, surely, lies in those small things, the ones that Jesus points to in the Gospel for today - in praise of the saints: *Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.*

At the 10am Mass we are inviting people to take part in a fun quiz on 25 popular saints - from John the Baptist to John Henry Newman.

And what is their common denominator? *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Give to all those who ask and do to others as you would have them do to you.* St Paul says the battle has been won for us already; why keep fighting for our own advantage?

But unlike the politicians – and some of in the Church too sometimes – remember that we are part of a bigger picture where God has fought the good fight ... and won. We don't need to keep trying to get ourselves up the greasy pole. Jesus will put us in the right place and in his own good time. All we have to do is to learn not to care what other people think of us - as best we can!

Better to follow the saints, gently seeking God's wisdom to make sense of all the rest.