

'Seven whole days, not one in seven'



ST MARY'S
ATTLEBOROUGH

Some thoughts from a sermon
on the sanctification of time

Feast of the Transfiguration • Sunday 6 August 2017

'The act of praying is an act of rebellion against slavery.'

(Archbishop Anthony Bloom, *Living Prayer*, 1966, p. 23)

'As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God.'

Psalm 123.2

We are **creatures of time**:

- **Linear time** – we are conceived, born, mature, grow old and die
- **Cyclical time** – the hours, days, weeks, months and years, a response to the natural world and environment around us with its rhythms and seasons

The Church's calling is to **sanctify time**: to **make time holy**, to deliberately and consciously bring time and all our activities *within* time into the higher sphere of God's presence and power.

Making linear time holy

The Sacraments: God's gifts to us throughout our lives to consecrate our human experiences to him and make 'spaces' for his grace to act within us:

- Two major Sacraments: **Baptism** and the **Eucharist**
- Five lesser Sacraments: **Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination, Reconciliation** (*Confession*) and the **Anointing of the Sick**

'Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.'

Tate and Brady

Making cyclical time holy

How do we sanctify the hours of the day?

- **The Daily Office** ('office' comes from *officium*, meaning 'duty')

- **Morning and Evening Prayer**

'Every clerk in Holy Orders is under obligation, not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause, to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer, either privately or openly.'

(One of the Church's rules: Canon C 26)

Every day at 8.45am and 5pm in St Mary's Church, each lasting 20 minutes: all welcome!

A simple structure: Opening praise

Psalms

A reading from the Old Testament

A reading from the New Testament

A canticle (song from the Scriptures): *Benedictus* in the morning, *Magnificat* in the evening

Prayers of thanksgiving or intercession

The collect (prayer) of the day

The Lord's Prayer

- The 'Daily Office' also includes shorter acts of prayer, especially **Prayer during the Day** (which can be said any time) and **Compline** (which is the Church's Night Prayer: it takes

its name from the Latin word meaning 'completion' and is a service of quietness and reflection before rest at the end of the day).

- The hours of the day correspond to aspects of our Creation and Redemption: the dawn reminds us of creation as we offer God the life of the day; in our work we remember that the Son of Man dignified human labour; at nightfall we are put in mind of death.
- But there are **many other ways** of praying each day too! Here are some ideas:
 - **Grace** before meals: e.g. 'For these and all his mercies may God's holy Name be blessed and praised for ever. Amen.'
 - **The Lord's Prayer** on rising and on going to bed
 - **Quiet time** during the day to read the Bible, perhaps with some Bible reading notes
 - The **Angelus**: three times a day, at morning, noon and 6pm, we recall the Incarnation when 'the Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary': there is a short, simple set of prayers to say
 - A time to **examine our conscience** at the end of the day to see where we have failed
 - **'Arrow prayers'**: e.g. 'Father, help that person in distress'; 'Show me what to say.'
 - A **visit to the Parish Church** when passing, perhaps to light a candle
 - The **Jesus Prayer**: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner'
 - Do you take the Sunday notice sheet home to include the sick and dead in your prayers?
 - If you have a smartphone, you can download the Church of England's **Daily Prayer app**

How do we sanctify the days of the week?

- **Sunday** is the First Day of the Week, a little Easter, the weekly celebration of the Resurrection. To be present at Holy Communion on Sundays is our duty and our joy.
- **Friday** is the day of the Crucifixion. We can make some small effort to remember this.
- The **saints' days and holy days** 'interrupt' our routine week and remind us of God's love.

How do we sanctify the months of the year?

- **The Church year** is the annual cycle of festivals, fasts and seasons:
 - Some of the celebrations are fixed to **certain days of the calendar** (e.g. Christmas Day)...
 - ...while others depend on **the date of Easter** (from which we count backwards to work out the date of Ash Wednesday, or forward to work out the date of Pentecost)
 - Two **major cycles** of the year:
 1. **ADVENT-CHRISTMAS-EPIPHANY** ends on Candlemas, forty days after Christmas
 2. **LENT-HOLY WEEK-EASTER** ends on Pentecost, fifty days after Easter
- 'The pilgrim Church **proclaims the Passover of Christ** in the feasts of the holy Mother of God, in the feasts of the apostles, martyrs, and saints, and the commemoration of the faithful departed.' The Eucharist is always celebrated in our Parish Church on major saints' days.
- The **anniversary** of our **baptism** and **confirmation** should be days of thanksgiving which are dear to us.
- In church, the major festivals are celebrated with **joy and gladness**, not just in worship but in the decoration of the church and festive fellowship afterwards.
- Not just for church! We should celebrate special days with **joy at home** too. Christmas cribs, pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, flowers in the house for favourite saints' days or our 'name day', etc. You can think of more!

This poem tells us about the Church year

Advent tells us 'Christ is near':
Christmas tells us 'Christ is here!'
In **Epiphany** we trace
All the glories of his grace.

Those **three Sundays before Lent**
Will prepare us to repent;
That in Lent we may begin
Earnestly to mourn for sin.

Holy Week and **Easter**, then,
Tell who died and rose again
O that happy Easter Day!
'Christ is risen indeed,' we say!

Yes, and Christ **ascended**, too,
To prepare a place for you,
So we give him special praise
After those Great Forty Days.

Then he sent the Holy Ghost
On the **Feast of Pentecost**,
With us ever to abide:
Well may we keep Whitsuntide!

Last of all, we humbly sing
Glory to our God and King,
Glory to the One-in-Three
On the **Feast of Trinity**.